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Laser medal

PROMINENT Egyptian scientist Dr Ahmed Zewail will be presented today with one of the most prestigious awards in the field of science. The medal, presented by the Franklin Institute in the US, acknowledges Zewail's research at the California Institute of Technology in the use of laser light in detecting chemical reactions instantaneously.

Previous recipients of the award include Einstein and Madam Curie.

Visits count

IRAQI Foreign Minister Mohamed Al-Sahaf yesterday criticised the Security Council's renewal of sanctions, in force since 1990, and denied that an agreement between Baghdad and UN secretary-general permitted unlimited inspections of Iraqi presidential palaces, Reuters reported.

Sahaf said at a news conference in New York the accord referred to an initial visit and subsequent visits if deemed necessary. He stopped short, however, of making concrete threats to end cooperation with the weapons inspectors of the UN Special Commission. *(see p.4)*

Jubilee strip

PROTESTS by three ultra-religious parties from the ruling Israeli coalition threatened to derail the main gala event commemorating Israel's 50th anniversary today.

The lawmakers representing the Shas, United Torah and Judaism parties demanded the cancellation of the "Jubilee Chimes" programme by the Batsheva Dance Troupe, because its members strip down to their underwear during the show.

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's chief of staff, Moshe Leon, held night-long talks trying to convince the troupe to remain fully clothed, but the director refused.

The Jubilee Chimes performance, at which US Vice President Al Gore is to be guest of honour, is scheduled to take place today at a Jerusalem stadium.

INSIDE

Dead-end London?

Prospects for a London breakthrough in the peace process appear bleak following the Cairo meeting between Mubarak and Netanyahu

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu appears determined to turn a deaf ear to warnings about the grave consequences of his policies. And despite several rounds of meetings, the current diplomacy of US envoys Dennis Ross and Martin Indyk are bearing no more fruit than their earlier endeavours.

A government statement said President Hosni Mubarak urged Netanyahu to "deal positively" with the American initiative "which represents the minimum required for reviving the peace process." The statement was issued following Tuesday's breakfast meeting between Mubarak and Netanyahu during the latter's brief visit to Cairo.

But Netanyahu, upon his return to Jerusalem, displayed even greater intransigence, declaring he would face international condemnation rather than risk Israel's security.

The US wants Israel to withdraw from 13.1 per cent of West Bank land in a further hand-over of territory under interim peace deals with the Palestinians. Israel, citing security concerns, is insisting on nine per cent.

Ross visited Israel and Indyk visited Israel and Egypt ostensibly to lay the groundwork for US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's separate meetings in London next Monday with Netanyahu and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat.

But analysts are convinced that these meetings will be dead before they are born unless the Americans can convince Netanyahu to accept their initiative.

Arafat, who is expected to visit Cairo on Saturday for consultations with Mubarak ahead of the London meetings, said publicly for the first time yesterday that he had accepted the American proposal and would not accept anything less.

"Under the agreement, the first two phases of redeployment were supposed to be from 40 per cent of the West Bank. Then, it was lowered to 30 per cent, then to 13 per cent," Arafat said at a news conference in Gaza with Foreign Minister Amr Moussa.

"We have accepted this, working from a positive position. We don't want to leave any chance for Netanyahu to escape implementation," he said.

Most analysts are aware that the bartering over percentages is shadow-play. The Palestinians have accepted the American proposal on the condition that there will be a third redeployment "not later than mid-1998", as guaranteed by then US Secretary of State Warren Christopher in the 1997 Hebron agreement.

"The carrying out of the third redeployment is the central feature of the signed agreements," Palestinian Legislative Council Speaker Ahmed Qrei told the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* on Tuesday. "And anyone who intends to overturn it should know he is violating the agreements."

It is a violation the Israeli government desperately wants the US to approve. Last week Israel's National Infrastructure Minister Ariel Sharon announced that Israel should only implement a second redeployment if the US provides a "written guarantee" that the third will be scrapped. More subtly, Netanyahu has intimated that a "more generous" second redeployment could be forthcoming if the US presses Arafat to accept his vision that the third redeployment be "collapsed" into the final status negotiations. The US, at the moment, appears unwilling to exert this pressure.

Maariv speculated yesterday that the US might call off the London meetings if Ross failed to narrow the gap between the Palestinian and Israeli positions. But David Bar-Illan, Netanyahu's senior adviser, said that he had not heard that the London meetings were in jeopardy.

Egyptian diplomats are convinced that the London talks are doomed to failure unless the US manages to persuade Netanyahu to accept its initiative. "I have no evidence to conclude that the London talks will deliver. Rather, the opposite," said a senior Egyptian diplomat.

According to Foreign Minister Moussa, the "Palestinians have given a positive reply to the US ideas, and nobody could suggest to them to accept less than that, but the peace process will not move forward unless the Israeli side also provides a positive reply."

Informed sources said that while Mubarak, at Tuesday's meeting, sincerely tried to impress on Netanyahu the necessity of moving ahead, the Israeli prime minister was busy trying to sell Egypt his plan for conditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon — a plan already rejected by Lebanon and Syria.

"It should be made clear that Egypt will not support any proposal that aims to break the unified stance of Lebanon and Syria, willingly adopted by both countries," Moussa said.

Egyptian officials are coming to the conclusion that Netanyahu is not concerned with peace-making. "He appears to be negotiating for negotiations' sake," a source said.

According to informed sources Arafat, in making preparations for the London talks, has brokered a deal with Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, who was on a visit to the Gulf, that Hamas would halt all "activities" against Israel, to give the meeting a full chance. But, warned one source, it is not possible for Arafat to go on excluding Hamas for long.

***Graham Usher** in Jerusalem,*
Dina Ezzat** and **Nevine Khalil
in Cairo; wire dispatches

photo: AP

...and it's off

In a textbook launch from equatorial French Guiana before dawn yesterday, an Ariane rocket lifted Egypt's first satellite into orbit

An Ariane rocket carried Egypt's first satellite together with a Japanese cousin into orbit Tuesday night (early Wednesday Cairo time), the 108th successful launch of an Ariane, officials said. The Ariane 4, equipped with four solid strap-on boosters, blasted off from Europe's launch site in Kourou, French Guiana, on the northern edge of South America at 7.53pm Tuesday local time (01.53 Wednesday Cairo time).

The rocket punched through a layer of low-altitude clouds but reappeared seconds later and was visible from the ground for over three minutes.

According to space officials, the Nilesat 101 satellite, Egypt's first satellite, separated from the Ariane rocket 21 minutes after lift-off. The 4,000-pound (1.8 metric ton) satellite will provide direct-to-home television, radio and data broadcasting throughout the Middle East, the Mediterranean region and North Africa.

The launch was watched by Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif, who travelled to Kourou especially for this purpose, and was broadcast live by Egyptian television.

On 31 May, Media Day, President Hosni Mubarak will inaugurate Nilesat's ground station at Sixth of October City, signalling that the satellite is now operational.

Once in orbit, Nilesat will make Egypt the first Arab and the first African country to have its own media satellite, thus joining the international outer space club as its 60th member.

Using the digital compression system, the satellite will be equipped to carry up to 84 television channels and 400 radio stations. Twenty television channels will be available free of charge, including the new specialised channels of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union (ERTU). These channels will include programmes covering education, culture, sports, family affairs, children, news shows and entertainment, in addition to the programmes found on local and satellite channels already in operation. Some Arab channels from Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, Jordan and Lebanon will also be available without subscription. Viewers will, however, need to buy a special decoder to watch the Egyptian and Arab stations.

About 23 channels will be encrypted, including the Pioneers Group (ART), Showtime, the second Egyptian satellite channel and Lebanon's LBC-plus. For these channels, viewers will need decoders and have to pay subscription fees.

"The launch of Nilesat is a cultural step forward that marks Egypt's entry into the 21st century with great confidence in its media capabilities," El-Sherif said. "It also marks Egypt's entry into the age of space technology as a pioneer state that seeks to affirm its Arab identity."

El-Sherif said that a second Egyptian satellite, larger than the first, will be ready for launching in 11 months. It will be equipped to carry as many as 102 television channels as well as 500 radio stations.

"This is a very important moment for Egypt and the Arab world. This launch gives us a very advanced satellite that will serve the whole of the Arab area, bringing culture, enlightenment and entertainment," Nilesat President Amin Bassiouni told a pre-launch news conference.

The satellite was built by France's Matra Marconi Space, a joint venture of Britain's General Electric and France's Lagadarere Groupe. It is designed to operate in space for 16 years.

Nilesat officials said the cost of the satellite, launch and insurance came to a total of $158 million.

Five minutes later, the Ariane rocket released BSAT-1b, a 2,650-pound (1.2 ton) direct television broadcast satellite for Tokyo-based Broadcasting Satellite System Corp. Company officials declined to disclose the cost of their mission. Specialists estimated the cost of the satellite, launch and insurance at over $130 million.

BSAT-1b, a Hughes 376 series satellite, was built by Los Angeles-based Hughes Space & Communications, a General Motors unit, and is designed to operate for 12 years.

The BSAT-1b is the 12th Japanese satellite launched by Ariane, allowing the company B-SAT to broaden its TV relay services in Japan.

"BSAT-1b will be an in-orbit spare and provide backup to more than 10 million households that receive direct TV broadcasts from the BSAT system," Arturo Rosales, Hughes senior vice-president said. Tuesday's mission was the fourth of 12 planned Ariane rocket launches for 1998. It was the 36th consecutive successful launch of an Ariane-4 rocket.

Arianespace, the commercial arm of the 13-nation European Space Agency, leads the world commercial launch market. But it has been experiencing trouble with its new, larger rocket, the Ariane 5.

In February, Arianespace admitted that the second launch of the rocket on 30 October had also experienced problems, after the first launch crashed in June 1996.

Officials reported the rocket had a "higher than expected roll" after separating from its booster rocket, and that additional tests would be needed. No date has been given for the next launch.

The Paris-based Arianespace company that launches the Ariane-4 rocket series said it now had 39 satellites on order to be launched, worth an estimated $3.4 billion.

A slow start in Khartoum

The first round of negotiations on the return of confiscated Egyptian property in Sudan was friendly but tough. Dina Ezzat taps Foreign Ministry sources

Egypt will "soon" regain some of its properties in Sudan that were confiscated by the Khartoum government a few years ago. "It should start in May," said one Egyptian official.

Although not all confiscated properties would have been returned by the end of next year, officials say they believe the first round was a decent beginning that should be followed by more constructive steps.

"*Relations between the two countries are crucial* for both sides; anything could be talked about and solved," said a senior official.

Back from a 10-day trip to Khartoum, Fouad Youssef, head of the Sudan department at the Foreign Ministry, said his delegation was given "a very courteous reception by the Sudanese brothers, be they officials or ordinary citizens. There is a real understanding that close relations between both countries will always have to be maintained."

The 16-member delegation, representing the ministries of education and irrigation as well as others that have had their property confiscated, arrived in Khartoum on 16 April and returned to Cairo last Monday. The delegation's mission was to work out a schedule for the implementation of a decree issued by Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir on 13 March to restore to Cairo all its confiscated properties as a sign of goodwill and readiness to revive relations that had soured between the two Nile Valley states over mutual allegations of interference in internal affairs.

Sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the Egyptian delegation arrived in Khartoum realising that a full and final schedule would not be completed by the end of the visit. Asked if he thought the negotiations were successful or problematic, one source said: "I don't think we need to necessarily use either word; we should not be saying the negotiations succeeded or failed. They were negotiations and they were meant to be this way."

According to another source, there were times when things appeared to be quite tough, yet it did not produce a sense of antagonism between the two sides. "I think that what we managed to do was quite compatible with the expectations we had," said one source. He explained that before the *delegation's arrival, Egypt submitted a long list of* the confiscated properties. "After giving the Khartoum government time to make its own survey, we went to Khartoum to find out whether they approved of our list. We never said that we are going to finalise everything. We know that there will be at least two more rounds of negotiations."

No date has been set for the next round, but it is likely to be held immediately before or after the first phase that will see the return of property. All negotiations will take place in Khartoum.

Some Cairo-based Sudanese sources appeared to share the Egyptian assessment. They suggested that the 10 days of negotiations in Khartoum were "okay *for a start" but added that much more* work needed to be done. They also cautioned that expectations on either side will have to be tailored within reasonable frameworks in order to facilitate the process.

A press communique was issued by the Sudanese department's chairman at the Foreign Ministry on Tuesday to "clear up all misunderstandings about the true nature and results of our mission." According to the communique, the first round of negotiations "ended by establishing a level of common understanding on the number of the confiscated properties and the way in which implementing the political decision that was taken to restore them was taken. The two sides will continue a close rapport to agree on the start of implementation and the hand-over [of these properties] to allow the Egyptian institutions to resume their noble role and message for the best interest of both peoples."

The properties in question include buildings and rest-houses owned by the Egyptian ministries of irrigation and defence, in addition to schools belonging to the Egyptian educational mission in Khartoum and elsewhere in Sudan. Of particular importance is the Khartoum branch of Cairo University, re-named the University of the Two Niles upon its confiscation. Egyptian officials say that *it is not just* a fairly big complex of buildings but an important symbol of Egypt's dedicated educational and cultural presence in Sudan. Khartoum hopes that it will be given a grace period of a few years on this particular institution, but Egypt appears to give it priority.

Sources on both sides affirm that despite the difference of opinions on some matters, there is sufficient political will on both sides to make things work. They also say that both sides wish to keep their differences under wraps to make sure that sensitivities do not resurface.

According to one official: "The main source of disagreement was the file of Sudan's involvement in supporting Egyptian militants. The file is being sorted out. Everything should be taken care of eventually."

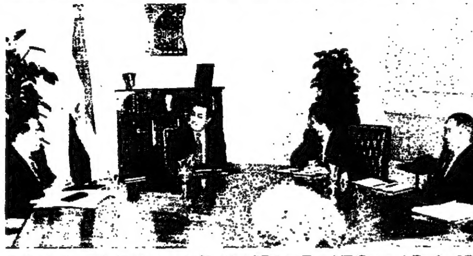
President Hosni Mubarak attending an Armed Forces ceremony at the monument to the unknown soldier in commemoration of the liberation of Sinai. The president paid tribute to those who sacrificed their lives for their country







(l-r) President Hosni Mubarak held discussions on Tuesday with Israeli PM Binyamin Netanyahu, then with US Assistant Secretary Martin Indyk, and a delegation of the US Council of Foreign Relations headed by Henry Siegman





Earlier in the week, Mubarak met with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and chief political presidential adviser Osama El-Baz; and attended celebrations with Mrs Mubarak on the anniversary of the Liberation of Sinai

Cairo's answer to 'Peace Now'

The Egyptian signatories of the *controversial Copenhagen Declaration* launched a local NGO called the Cairo Peace Movement. Nevine Khalil looks at their ambitious agenda

After five months of preparations, the Cairo Peace Movement (CPM), a *non-governmental organisation*, was launched formally at a press conference last week, with its founders pledging that it would work to promote stability in the entire Middle East and not confine itself to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The CPM was founded by the nine Egyptian signatories to the Copenhagen Declaration as well as 21 other leading intellectuals, academics and businessmen. It will serve as "a forum for enlightened thought," its founders said. The CPM, which describes itself as "an academic and research centre", advocates a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East, especially the creation of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, full withdrawal from the Golan Heights and southern Lebanon and unconditional implementation of all UN resolutions.

The CPM aims to carry out research, hold seminars in order to "disseminate a culture of peace with the aim of achieving comprehensive development", exchange visits with similar societies and establish a specialised library. Funding for the movement will come mainly from Egyptian donations and a membership fee of LE10 per year. It is yet unclear whether the government will subsidise the movement, as is the practice with some other licensed non-governmental organisations. Foreign donations are also acceptable, but have to be cleared by the Ministry of Social Affairs. A budget of as much as *LE1 million is anticipated within a few months, and it is expected* membership will rise to as many as 300 soon.

The CPM took only five months to come into existence — a relatively short time for any non-governmental organisation to receive a licence from the Ministry of Social Affairs. Founding members debated at length whether CPM would be independent of Copenhagen, or the Egyptian chapter of Copenhagen, finally deciding that it will serve as the think tank for the Egyptian chapter of Copenhagen, but will not limit its work to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

The signing of the Copenhagen Declaration in January 1997, which created an "International Alliance for Arab-Israeli Peace", triggered a fierce debate in Egypt. The Egyptian signatories included renowned *Al-Ahram* columnist Lutfi El-Kholi, Egypt's former ambassador to Moscow Salah Bassiouni, Abdel-Moneim Said, head of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies, prominent lawyer Ali El-Shalaqani and cinematographer Ramsis Marzouk. The Egyptian signatories were a target for heavy-handed accusations of betrayal, and are still today regularly denounced in many intellectual circles for allegedly normalising relations with Israel — a charge they hotly deny.

The Cairo Peace Movement is for "all peace-lovers in Egypt," according to Bassiouni, the movement's chairman.

"Now we have new tools to manage the Arab-Israeli conflict," said El-Kholi, "since the obsolete tools of sloganeering have proved useless".

"In general, Egyptian public opinion wants a just and comprehensive peace, and we represent a large majority of Egyptians," Bassiouni said. "We will be able to communicate with other peaceful groups in Israel, Europe and the US which reject the current Likud government's policies." He added that the Cairo Peace Movement does not intend to work with government *officials, either in Israel or elsewhere.*

Although the peace process will be a top priority, the aims of the movement transcend the Arab-Israeli conflict, and it plans to deal with other issues plaguing the region, such as the unrest in Algeria and the UN sanctions imposed on Iraq and Libya. "Since we are promoting peace in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict is of primary importance," noted Abdel-Moneim Said, "but there are also other conflicts in the region." The Cairo Peace Movement will also address the issues of military imbalance in the region, economic conditions, security and stability.

"We believe that, from a purely Egyptian point of view, for this country to develop and acquire a good standing in the international arena, we need a stable and peaceful Middle East," added Said. This aim will be pursued through dialogue, mediation, seminars, studies, "by all the means that NGOs can use — pamphlets, books, magazines."

Armed with what is already an ambitious agenda, the Cairo Peace Movement will work to create a specialised research centre on Israeli society, as well as opening dialogue with other peace movements around the world. "The Cairo Peace Movement has a purely Egyptian position," Bassiouni asserted.

The CPM research division will focus *on Israeli society, in order* to collect a strong database on its people, the dynamics of their society, and the nature of different political groups. Said, who will chair the CPM research body, contrasted it with the strictly academic Al-Ahram Centre, for example, by saying that "it will be an advocacy group which looks at policies and ways to resolve conflicts, and act accordingly."

"The Cairo-based group will work on ideas and research, not politics," asserted El-Kholi. "CPM will provide information and data about the various forces in Israel with which we could coordinate." The research programme will also carry out studies and surveys inside Israel, "something which is not possible for other study centres," he added.

A lot of work still lies ahead for the members of the Cairo Peace Movement. Major tasks in the near future include defining the structure of their organisation, expanding its budget and, of course, improving their image with the public.

Social Justice in deep freeze

A conflict between two factions seeking control over the Social Justice Party escalated this week from fried chicken suppers to *molotov* cocktails, but the two groups have at least found a common target for their wrath. Fatemah Farag goes to the bottom of the menu

The Political Parties Committee convened on 26 April to investigate the dossier of accusations and counter-accusations exchanged by two rival factions battling for control of the Social Justice Party and its weekly newspaper, *Al-Watan Al-Arabi*. The Committee decided to freeze the party's activities, until a court-of-law rules on the dispute or an out-of-court settlement *is reached by the two groups. With this decision*, the Committee has become the common target of the two factions' wrath, providing them at last with something to agree upon after weeks of intensive bickering.

"Of course we are shocked by the decision," said a forlorn Azza Kamel, a leading party member and wife of Mohamed Abdel-Aal, the party's chairman who was first deposed by a rival faction and later restored by his own group. "We think this is a way of getting back at the newspaper which was fighting *corruption, because there is nothing* wrong with our party. We are very moderate, almost like a branch of the ruling National Democratic Party."

Kamel added that their lawyers were in the process of taking the necessary legal action against the decision, as well as pursuing their claims against the rival faction, headed by Abdel-Rashid Ahmed.

A deflated, but not defeated, Ahmed told *Al-Ahram Weekly*, "We cannot comment on the decision... But I will tell you that it was not a surprise because this committee should be called the 'committee to turn down parties', and not the committee to legalise them. The battle will go on and we will contest this decision."

The Social Justice Party made news two weeks ago after 300 *members held a controversial general* assembly and elected Abdel- Rashid Ahmed as party chairman, thereby deposing Abdel-Aal. The latter and his supporters, however, refused to hand over party assets on the grounds that the general assembly was illegal. And on 24 April they held their own general assembly and unanimously re-elected Abdel-Aal.

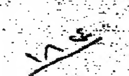
In the meantime, avid readers of *Al-Watan Al-Arabi* — a widely distributed weekly newspaper — were treated to two versions of their favourite paper, one published on Sunday by *Ahmed's* faction and the other on Tuesday by Abdel-Aal's. However, readers will not enjoy a repeat of this double pleasure this coming week, since the newspaper was suspended along with other party activities.

The controversy threatened to take a nasty turn last week. In a statement signed by Ahmed and others describing themselves as Abdel-Aal's "victims who were slaughtered", Abdel-Aal was warned against holding his general assembly and told that he would be "sorry" if he went ahead. According to published *reports, police* arrested 13 thugs outside party headquarters on the morning scheduled for the assembly meeting. Although the identities of the thugs and those who hired them were not revealed, press reports said they were carrying molotov cocktails, firearms and knives.

Kamel said: "We held a very successful general assembly that was attended by 250 party members from 17 governorates, but we had to seek the protection of the Agouza police." Ahmed, however, claims the thugs were hired by Abdel-Aal.

Both parties have submitted full files of their accusations and counter-accusations to the Prosecutor General's Office which opened an investigation. Ahmed also filed a lawsuit with a Giza court requesting custodianship of the party. Hearings will open on 15 May. "I had promised to drop the lawsuit when the general assembly elected me, but as things stand now, I will go through with this procedure as well," said Ahmed.

Meanwhile, insoluble mysteries remain. For example, how did two versions of the newspaper get printed and distributed, although the party is licensed to publish one newspaper only? Are business interests truly involved in the attempted takeover? And who stands to benefit from the present situation?



Opposition boycotts Shura Council elections

Most opposition parties will not be presenting candidates at next June's Shura Council elections. **Gamal Essam El-Din** investigates the motives for —yet another— boycott

The ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) is assured of a landslide victory in a lacklustre election to fill 88 Shura Council seats scheduled for 7 June. The reason is that most opposition parties have decided to boycott the vote. In addition to the 88 elected members, 44 others will be appointed by President Hosni Mubarak.

The Council, which has no legislative powers, is made up of 264 members. Two-thirds of them are chosen by secret ballot in general elections and the remaining third are appointed by the president. A member's term of office may last up to six years, but one half of the elected and appointed members are chosen by lot to lose their seats after three years. Others are elected or appointed in their place. Losers are eligible for re-election or re-appointment.

The Council's functions include preparing reports on current issues and debating laws that are considered supplementary to the Constitution before they are sent to the People's Assembly for approval.

Candidates for the June elections began registering their names on 21 April and registration will continue until 7 May. Kamal El-Shazli, the NDP's assistant secretary-general, said the ruling party is preparing for victory by nominating candidates in all constituencies. The NDP's list of candidates, which has been approved by Mubarak in his capacity as NDP chairman, was announced last Tuesday. He added that the choice of candidates was determined by good reputation, popularity, partisan commitment, hard work and a proven record of public service.

For their part, opposition figures argued that campaigning for seats in a Council that has no legislative or supervisory powers is not worth the effort or the expense.

The Wafd Party of Fouad Serageddin announced last week that it was boycotting the elections for this reason. In a "statement to the nation," the Wafd said the Council should be armed with legislative and supervisory powers or else it should be disbanded to "relieve the state budget of its financial burden."

The Wafd, claiming that the current electoral system favoured the NDP, said citizens do not bother to vote in Shura Council elections. "Since the 1923 Constitution was repealed, the ruling party has resorted to the systematic rigging of elections to impose its will on the nation's political life," the Wafd said. "All parliamentary elections, the last of which took place in November 1995, were rigged... As a result, the ruling party now controls at least 98 per cent of such representative bodies as the People's Assembly, Shura Council and city councils."

The leftist Tagammu Party of Khaled Mohieddin does not plan to field candidates in the elections, but for a different reason. According to the party's Secretary-General Rifaat El-Said, campaigning is too costly for Tagammu's modest financial resources.

"The constituencies of the Shura Council cover vast areas. Each is four times as large as a People's Assembly constituency," El-Said pointed out. However, El-Said, who was appointed a Shura Council member three years ago, indicated that Tagammu will "politically" support any of its members who decides to run for election.

Ahmed El-Sabahi, chairman of the small Umma Party, also argued that the expense of running for election has become too high. "Wealthy people, such as businessmen, prefer to join the ruling party, and most of their financial support goes to this party, in the hope of having a place on its list of candidates for Shura Council or People's Assembly elections," said El-Sabahi.

The Nasserist and Islamist-oriented Labour parties adopted similar positions.

Diaeddin Dawoud, chairman of the Nasserist Party, was quoted as saying that election rigging has produced an "unbalanced representation" of parties in parliament. "We [opposition parties] proposed many times an agenda of political reform in an attempt to introduce a free, fair and transparent electoral system, but the ruling party never bothered to listen to us," Dawoud said. "To ensure the integrity of any parliamentary elections, we have three simple demands: revising the lists of voters' names, full judicial supervision of the elections and time on radio and television to explain our platforms to as many people as possible."

The outlawed Muslim Brotherhood also decided to boycott the elections.

The Liberal Party of Mustafa Kamel Murad is the only opposition party to have decided to contest the elections. In 1995, this party nominated 44 candidates but none of them managed to win a seat.

The NDP won an easy victory in the 1995 elections, which were also boycotted by most opposition parties. The NDP now has 248 seats in the Council and the remaining seats are held by 11 independents and five opposition figures, most of them, if not all, appointed by the president.

The outgoing 132 members include the Council's Speaker Mustafa Kamal Helmi, four cabinet ministers, four former ministers, former Prime Minister Ali Lutfi, five journalists (out of 10) and 10 women (out of 15).

High officials who are expected to be appointed to the Council include Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Interior Minister Habib El-Adli and Economy Minister Youssef Ghali. Also likely to be appointed are such prominent businessmen as Ibrahim Kamel, chairman of the Egypt-US Presidents' Council, Abdel-Moneim Seoudi, chairman of the Federation of Egyptian Industries, and Ahmed Ezz, the Federation's deputy chairman.

Mohamed Ragab, majority leader in the Council, insists that it does play a vital political, social and economic role. "Over the past three years, the Shura Council has addressed some of the most serious national and regional issues, such as terrorism, democratisation, the rights of women, poverty and human development, economic reform and national security," he said.



Obituary

A legendary shutter closes

After working behind the camera for over half a century, Wahid Farid, the nation's top director of photography, died last week. **Hani Mustafa** profiles the man who helped change the way we see things

"Others may consider the camera an inanimate object, a piece of metal, but for me, it is the world." With these words, cinematographer Wahid Farid described the tool which, as a result of his expertise, became the means by which be portrayed and reflected the emotions and sentiments expressed on the faces of the leading actors and actresses of his time.

Farid, who died of renal failure, began his career in 1938 in Studio Misr, the school of the then fledgling Egyptian cinema industry. After working as an apprentice with another master of the lens, Abdo Nasr, Farid began his long love affair with the camera that ended last week with his death.

Farid's start in the business came in 1939 when he was chosen to work as an assistant to photographer Mustafa Hassan, who was commissioned by Studio Misr to shoot a documentary about the pilgrimage to Mecca. A few years later, Farid was assigned his first dramatic film, *Ibn El-Sharq* (Son of the Orient), directed by Ibrahim Helmi. Then followed *Bayyoumi Effendi*, starring Youssef Wahbi and Faten Hamama. After that, Farid's name quickly spread in cinema circles as the new rising star of photography.

Farid had a big interest in faces and facial expressions, which created a bond between him and the actor/actress. This, in turn, broke down the barrier between the man behind the camera and whomever was before it. As a result, what he captured on film appeared spontaneous on the screen.

"It is not the camera that loves its subject; it's the person handling it who does," Farid once said. He cited the television series *Damir Abla Hekmat* (Miss Hekmat's conscience). All the scenes in which Hamama appeared were shot under soft illumination, thus accentuating the dramatic.

Over the years, Farid gave the Egyptian cinema industry several landmark films, including *Do'aa El-Karawan* (The nightingale's prayer-song). Many of his movies were produced by famed actor Anwar Wagdi. After studying colour and cinemascope photography in England and Italy, Farid introduced both techniques back home. He shot *Dalila* and *Rudda Qalbi* (My heart is spurned) — the first colour-cinemascope films produced in Egypt.

Farid's mastery of his art was rewarded on several occasions. He received the Photography Merit Award for several of his motion pictures, including *Erham Demoo'ee* (Pity my tears), *Bein El-Atlal* (Amidst the ruins), *Gaalooni Mogreman* (They made me a criminal) and *El-Khataya* (Sins).

Farid was also a producer. He joined forces with director Hassan El-Saifi to establish the Heliopolis Cinema Production Company. Among their most important productions was one film whose hero had not yet been chosen until Farid met in El-Saifi's house with a young composer, Kamal El-Tawil. El-Tawil, in turn, was accompanied by a young man who sang one of El-Tawil's compositions. After hearing him sing, both Farid and El-Saifi immediately asked this young talent to play the lead role in their new musical production *Lahn El-Wafa'a* (Melody of loyalty). It was the film that introduced Abdel-Halim Hafez to movie-goers.

Farid did the shooting in Hafez's second film, *Ayamna El-Helwa* (Our sweet days). He later joined Ramses Naguib in producing *Maw'ed Gharam* (A love rendezvous), starring Hafez and Hamama. Farid and Hafez later established the New Arab World Company which produced, among other works, *El-Banat Wel Saif* (Girls and the summer).

Beginning in the early 1990s, when the Egyptian cinema industry started churning out low-quality productions, Farid stayed away. He confined himself to shooting TV soaps, including *Damir Abla Hekmat* and *Demoo Sahebat Al-Galala* (Tears of Her Majesty). One of the last films he shot for television was *El-Sayed Kaf* (Mr K), directed by Salah Abu Seif in 1994.

Abdel-Moneim · El-Ansari · Ragab · Eissa · Salmawy · Saraya · Barakat · Salah · Qenawi · Zoheiri · Osman

Turning over a new leaf

Several newspapers and magazines are turning over a new leaf after their top editorial positions changed hands. **Shaden Shehab** reports

The Shura Council, whose responsibilities include supervising the national press, has announced a series of changes in the top editorial positions of several newspapers and magazines, as well as the Middle East News Agency (MENA). The most significant changes, announced Thursday, were the appointment of Mohamed Abdel-Moneim as board chairman and chief editor of the weekly magazine *Rose El-Youssef*, replacing Mahmoud El-Tohami, and the appointment of Mahfouz El-Ansari as MENA's board chairman and editor-in-chief, replacing Mustafa Naguib.

Both El-Tohami and Naguib were not assigned new positions.

In an earlier, but limited reshuffle, Adel Hammouda, deputy chief editor of *Rose El-Youssef*, was re-assigned to the *Al-Ahram* newspaper.

Abdel-Moneim, 61, began his career as a news editor on the Foreign Desk of *Al-Ahram* in 1968. A few years later, he became the newspaper's military correspondent and took an active part in the coverage of the 1973 October War. He later became assistant chief editor, deputy chief editor and then chief editor of *Al-Difaa* (Defence), a magazine specialising in military affairs and published by *Al-Ahram*. From 1989 until 1994, he served as President Hosni Mubarak's press secretary. He later returned to *Al-Ahram* as managing editor.

Abdel-Moneim's re-assignment to *Rose El-Youssef* took journalists by surprise, out of a sense that Abdel-Moneim hailed from a very different school of journalism than that represented by *Rose El-Youssef*. Under its former chief editor, *Rose El-Youssef* seemed to pin its popularity on highlighting cases of corruption of government officials and dealing openly, and some would say sensationally, with "taboo" subjects such as sex and religion.

However, Abdel-Moneim told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he does not plan to alter the magazine's character. *Rose El-Youssef*, he said, "is an old magazine with a special identity and I am a professional journalist, not an amateur. Therefore, I will not try to change its identity since this would be an act of suicide that could only lead to failure."

Abdel-Moneim added that he will improve "only the quality and strengthen its positive aspects." Asked whether the magazine will stop publishing stories on sex and Copts, Abdel-Moneim responded: "I will not resort to anything that goes against society's ethics. There will be no sensational stories or articles that are not based on actual fact."

Abdel-Moneim expressed confidence that the magazine's circulation "will increase and that it will remain, as it has always been, a respectable magazine."

The magazine's latest issue, which hit the news-stands last Sunday, was subdued compared to previous issues. Instead of the usual sex story, there was an article on new technology that could decide a baby's gender before conception. There was also the usual "Coptic" story, but it dealt with a minor conflict between a bishop and a priest in southern Egypt.

El-Ansari, who began his career as a reporter on Arab affairs for MENA, was chief editor of *Al-Gomhouria* newspaper, published by Al-Tahrir publishing house. Currently abroad, El-Ansari could not be reached for comment on his appointment.

Other appointments made by the Shura Council:

— Galal Eissa, board chairman of Dar El-Shaab and chief editor of *Rai El-Shaab*;

— Samir Ragab, board chairman of Dar El-Tahrir and chief editor of *Al-Gomhouria*;

— Mahmoud Salah, chief editor of *Akher Sa'a* magazine;

— Mohamed Salmawy, chief editor of the French-language *Al-Ahram Hebdo*;

— Osama Saraya, chief editor of *Al-Ahram Al-Arabi* magazine;

— Mohamed Abdel-Aziz Barakat, chief editor of *Akhbar El-Hawadeth*;

— Amal Osman, chief editor of *Akhbar El-Nogoom*;

— Suleiman Qenawi, chief editor of *Akhbar El-Sayyarat*;

— Mou'eness Zoheiri, chief editor of the children's magazine *El-Bolbol*;

— Mohamed El-Hanafi Foda, chief editor of *El-Massa'a*;

— Mohamed Noureddin, chief editor of *Horreyati* magazine;

— Gamal Ahmed, chief editor of *Al-Kora Wal-Mala'eb* sports magazine;

— Salama Abdel-Fattah, board chairman of Dar El-Ta'awon and chief editor of *El-Siyassi El-Mesri*.

In another development, Giza Governor Maher El-Guindi dropped the libel charges he had brought against renowned columnist Mahmoud El-Saadani. A Press Syndicate investigative committee had concluded that El-Saadani did not breach the journalists' code of ethics. A report by the committee, sent to El-Guindi, said that El-Saadani had not exceeded the limits of permissible criticism.

In a third development, a Cairo court turned down a prosecutor's appeal requesting a stay of execution of prison sentences passed against three journalists until the Court of Cassation reaches a final decision. Acting on the Press Syndicate's request, the prosecutor had requested the suspension of a one-year jail sentence passed against Magdi Hussein, chief editor of *Al-Shaab*, mouthpiece of the Islamist-oriented Labour Party, and its cartoonist Mohamed Hilal, as well as a six-month sentence passed against Gamal Fahmi, managing editor of the weekly newspaper *Al-Destour*, now closed.

Hussein and Hilal were found guilty of slandering Alaa El-Alfi, son of former Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi. Fahmi was found guilty of slandering writer Tharwat Abaza.

A question of implementation

Arab interior and justice ministers have signed their first anti-terrorism treaty but, as **Amira Ibrahim** writes, much will depend on the parties' commitment to implementation



Arab interior and justice ministers met in Cairo last week and signed the first anti-terrorism treaty

After five years of studies and debates, Arab interior and justice ministers gave their stamp of approval last week to the first Arab Treaty for Combating Terrorism. The treaty was signed on 22 April at the Arab League headquarters in the presence of the League's Secretary-General Esmat Abdel-Meguid.

Abdel-Meguid expressed hope that the treaty would be followed by a similar international treaty. "The treaty is a good step forward to persuade Western countries to cooperate with us in order to reach a similar international agreement," Abdel-Meguid said.

A statement issued by the League affirmed an intention to intensify Arab action to confront all negative phenomena, including terrorism and extremism.

Israeli state-sponsored terrorism was condemned. "We should also remember that state terrorism is as serious as terrorism unleashed by individuals and groups and should be similarly confronted," said Lebanese Justice Minister Bahij Tobara, who was speaking on the anniversary of the Qana massacre in which more than 100 Lebanese civilians were killed by Israeli shelling of a UN camp in southern Lebanon.

The League's Council of Interior Ministers issued a statement lambasting Israel as one of the main sources of terrorism in the region. "Israel pretends that it embraces democracy and combats terrorism only to achieve its colonisation schemes, on the one hand, and distort the image of Arabs and Muslims on the other," the statement said.

The proceedings were due to last for two days, during which the ministers were scheduled to exchange views on the treaty. But only two sessions, one public and the other in camera, were held. Ahmed bin Mohamed Al-Salem, the council's secretary-general, read out the concluding statement.

The delegation from the United Arab Emirates suggested an Arab boycott of any country that violates the provisions of the treaty. "The suggestion will be considered during a discussion of the mechanisms proposed for implementing the treaty," Al-Salem told a news conference following the signing ceremony.

Behind the scenes, some differences reportedly emerged over the interpretation of some of the treaty's 42 articles. Some participants were reportedly dissatisfied with one article in the treaty stipulating that people accused of negligence in military duty are to be exempt from extradition. Moreover, the article dealing with extradition of terrorists did not appear to be binding on all Arab countries. The treaty states that implementation is done via mechanisms of bilateral agreements but many Arab countries do not have bilateral extradition agreements.

While Arab human rights groups were studying the legal consequences of the accord, a statement by an Egyptian militant group condemned the treaty as hostile to the Islamist movement.

The statement, signed by Abdallah Al-Mansour, secretary of the Islamic Jihad — Vanguards of Conquest group — said the treaty aimed at "encircling" youths of the Muslim nation.

"Arab governments should reconsider their positions and refrain from implementing the treaty," said the statement, which was faxed to the London-based, Arabic-language newspaper *Al-Hayat*.

Since 1992, Egyptian authorities have signed several bilateral security accords with Arab and non-Arab countries, focusing on fighting terrorism and the extradition of terrorists. Meanwhile, authorities pushed for an all-Arab anti-terrorism treaty.

Speaking ahead of the conference, Egyptian Interior Minister Habib El-Adli highlighted the importance of thwarting any attempt at destabilisation. "We are determined to defend our heritage, our present and our future," he vowed.

Also ahead of the conference, Sudan offered to conclude a security accord with Egypt. But following the difficult negotiations in Khartoum on restoring confiscated Egyptian property, the accord is up in the air.

The interior ministers of Algeria and Morocco met on the sidelines of the conference, their first encounter since a meeting in Morocco a year earlier. The two countries had traded accusations of hosting militants and closed their joint border in 1994.

The treaty, which lays down guidelines for cooperation in the war against terrorism, was approved in principle by the Council of Arab Interior Ministers in Tunis last January. Since then, nine articles have been amended. They deal with the judicial procedures of extradition, cooperation in investigations and the trial of a national of an Arab country by another country.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



ISRAELIS of the Peace Now movement demonstrate in front of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's residence, holding a placard showing Netanyahu strangling a dove which symbolises the peace process. One hundred demonstrators tried to pressure Netanyahu into making progress during his talks with US special envoy Dennis Ross on Saturday in Jerusalem. *(photo AFP)*

Unremitting sanctions

Despite a favourable report by the International Atomic Energy Agency, the UN Security Council has once again bowed to US demands and voted to maintain anti-Iraq sanctions at their current level

After a day-long meeting, the UN Security Council on Monday maintained UN sanctions against Iraq. The US, though acknowledging for the first time that Iraq had made progress in dismantling its banned nuclear weapons program, said it was too early to lift the seven-year old sanctions or to scale back wide-ranging nuclear inspections.

At its closed session, the Security Council concluded that there was no consensus among the 15 members to modify the sanctions regime. It adjourned an afternoon session to hear an unprecedented personal appeal from Iraqi Foreign Minister Said El-Sahhaf to lift the embargo. El Sahhaf reiterated that Baghdad no longer held any weapons of mass destruction. He also reassured the Council that Iraq would abide by the terms of the agreement signed with UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in Baghdad last February. However, El Sahhaf's appeal was rejected.

The Security Council imposed sweeping sanctions in 1990 after Iraqi president Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait.

After a US-led forces drove the Iraqis from Kuwait, the council agreed to maintain the sanctions until UN inspectors certified that Iraq had destroyed all long-range missiles and chemical, nuclear and biological weapons.

A review to the sanctions is usually held every 60 days, but the process was suspended last June after Iraq obstructed weapons inspections.

Monday's review is the first since Iraq signed its deal with Annan to open all sites, including presidential compounds, to UN arms inspectors.

During a heated session, members of the Security Council questioned Chief UN Inspector Richard Butler on his latest six-month report. In his report, Butler stated that the standoff over presidential sites made it virtually impossible to determine if Iraq had complied with disarmament orders.

However, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has reported that it has found no evidence that Iraq was still secretly constructing nuclear weapons.

Based on that finding, the US came under strong pressure from France, Russia and China who demanded that the council should acknowledge Iraq's cooperation and scale down nuclear inspections.

Russia circulated a draft resolution stating that Iraq has fully cooperated with UN inspectors on nuclear issues but would still be subject to inspections if the IAEA receives more information about its clandestine programme.

France said it was too early to lift sanctions but argued that the council should take stock of Iraq's progress in nuclear weapons.

Most outspoken was China's Deputy Ambassador Shen Guofang who argued that the weapons inspection programme should be closed down as soon as possible. He accused UNSCOM inspectors of behaving like "an army of occupation" and acting in an "arrogant and insolent manner".

Defending the US stance, White House spokesman Mike McCurry stated that "there is one narrow area involving the nuclear weapons programmes that have been reviewed carefully by the IAEA... Aside from that area, we think that the conditions that would be necessary for broad-based sanctions relief don't present themselves because Saddam Hussein has not fully complied with the requirements the international community placed on them."

The US holds that more information are needed on nuclear enrichment, design and imports to Iraq in the past and that there is much that needs to be done on chemical and biological weapons as well as on human rights and accounting for prisoners taken from Kuwait in 1990.

Iraq has accused the US and Britain of manipulating the inspection programme to maintain sanctions indefinitely.

According to reports, US officials are concerned that effectively closing the book on Iraq's nuclear file might step up international pressure to end the sanctions prematurely. Nevertheless, Washington also fears an uncompromising stance will backfire and weaken international resolve to maintain the overall inspections and the sanctions programme.

Earlier, before the Security Council decision, Baghdad warned that if sanctions are not lifted it will no longer abide by the UN sanctions and will break the embargo.

In Baghdad, General Amer Saadi, an adviser to president Saddam Hussein, said that future ties with UNSCOM would be "determined in the light of the results of the Security Council debate". US Ambassador to the UN Bill Richardson dismissed such threats as Iraqi "bluster".

Ze'evi must go

Netanyahu has struck a deal with a party whose founding principle is the "ethnic cleansing" of Israel. **James Zogby** wonders why

On the eve of yet another round of peace talks with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu has invited the leader of the Moledet Party to join his coalition government.

The Moledet (Homeland) Party is not just another far-right Zionist grouping. Its founding principle, as stated in its charter, is the call to transfer Arabs out of "Eretz Israel": "The sure cure for the demographic ailment is the transfer of the Arabs to Arab countries as an aim of any negotiations and a way to solve the Israeli-Arab conflict over the land of Israel." By "Arabs", the Modelet Party means not only the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza: its members also seek to "cleanse" Israel of its Palestinian Arab citizens. And by "demographic ailment", the Modelet means not only the presence of Arabs in Israel's midst, but also the "troubling high birth rate" of the Arab population.

While such racism puts the Modelet Party in the same camp as the Le Pen movement in France, or the David Duke movement in the United States, even those bigots do not call for the forced expulsion of the communities they see as polluting their respective societies.

The Moledet Party differs only slightly from the racist effort founded by the late Meir Kahane. In fact, the Moledet Party's leader, Rehavam Ze'evi (who will now sit in Netanyahu's cabinet) has been described by the Israeli commentator Nahum Barnea as "Kahane in a general's uniform" — referring to his days in the 1970s as the brutal military commander of the West Bank.

Ze'evi has a controversial past. Allegations of his connection with organised crime resulted in his being denied the post of police commissioner in the Shamir-led government in 1989. He is also widely remembered for having caused a diplomatic flap in 1991 when, as Likud minister without portfolio, he called then US President George Bush "an anti-Semite and a liar".

When Shamir agreed to go to the Madrid peace talks, the Moledet and an allied party, Tehiya, bolted the government and brought about its collapse.

More recently, Ze'evi has continued his inflammatory rhetoric. He has called Palestinian Authority President Yasser Arafat a "war criminal" and Egypt's President Mubarak a "liar". He led violent protests against Netanyahu's decision to sign the Hebron agreement and has repeatedly pledged his commitment to annulling the Oslo Accords.

Given this background, one might well ask why Netanyahu has brought Ze'evi and his party into the government and why there has been no reaction to this disturbing move. Ze'vi's only pledge to Netanyahu, apparently, is that he will not support a no-confidence motion. But he has reaffirmed his strong opposition to Oslo and to surrendering any more land to the Palestinians. He has also refused to alter his party's position on "transfer".

One might argue that many of Ze'evi's positions are held by others in the Knesset, even in the Netanyahu government. Ariel Sharon, for example, has also referred to Arafat as a "war criminal". Rafael Eitan, the former general who called Palestinians "drugged cockroaches", called in the 1980s for the forced transfer of one million Palestinians from the West Bank. And the majority of the current Likud coalition continues to support the claim to all of "Eretz Israel" — while hypocritically insisting that the Palestinians change their national charter.

Has Netanyahu merely added a vote to protect his coalition government, as some analysts speculate? Or has he added an ideological partner to his government to strengthen its resolve? Is it not appropriate to ask the Netanyahu government for an explanation of this most troubling addition at this most sensitive moment? It would be inconceivable for a centre-right coalition in France to invite Le Pen to join its government, just as it would be impossible for the US Republican Party to seek the support of David Duke. Imagine the tremors that Ze'evi's appointment must be causing among Israel's Palestinian Arab citizens, and all the Palestinians who, in this year of Israel's 50th anniversary, are reliving once again the horrors of forced expulsion from their homes and villages. Surely the addition of Rehavam Ze'evi to the government should not be allowed to pass without protest.

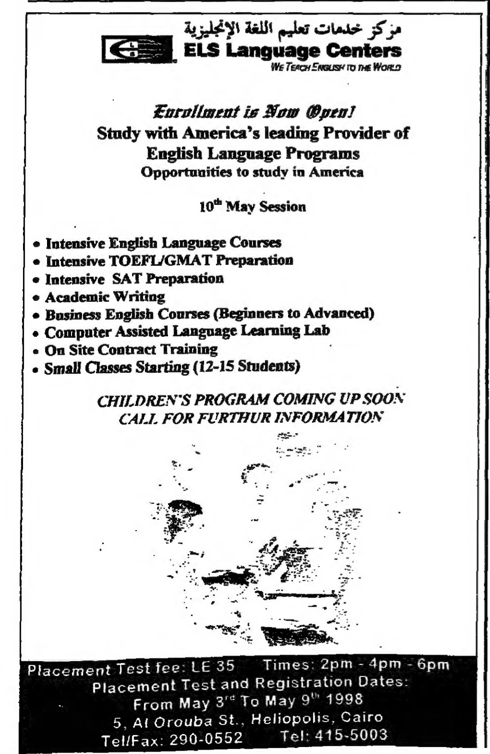
Netanyahu's argument that he needs votes to remain in power is the basest of falsehoods. As elected prime minister, he has the option to create any coalition government he chooses to create. Should he agree to honour the Oslo Accords and make the required withdrawals from the West Bank, he may lose the support of the ultra-right. But it has already been made clear to him that he can, if he wishes, form a new government of at least 85 Knesset members if he agrees to a just peace with the Palestinians.

It appears that it is not to protect his government, but to protect his hold over Eretz Israel that has motivated the addition of Ze'evi to the cabinet. Arabs should demand his immediate ouster.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

Stories of dispossession

A two-day meeting in Cairo brought together international and local NGOs working in the Occupied Territories. But **Mariz Tadros** heard more about the problems of the former than the experience of the latter



What is an NGO to do when confronted with a government that obstructs its efforts to get closer to the people it seeks to serve? World Vision has long sought to 'indigenise' its offices in the Occupied Territories. Yet despite a partnership with local Palestinian NGOs for over more than 10 years, it is still far from achieving its aim.

"We can't do it because we [as foreigners] are the only people who can get in and out of Gaza during the closures," explained Mary Kate Isaac from World Vision. "We can go from areas A, B and C, but it is a long and problematic saga for our Gaza coordinator to come to our staff meetings in Jerusalem or for our staff to go to Gaza. One day the staff's permission is valid, the next day some incident happens and it is no longer valid. They must come to work illegally, sneaking in or out, or not come to work at all."

Isaac's group was one of the many international and Palestinian NGOs attending the United Nations International NGO Meeting on the Question of Palestine this week in Cairo to explore the theme, "The Palestinian Question: international responsibility 50 years later". Don Betz, Chairman of the International Co-ordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine (ICCP) pointed out that although NGOs have been involved in offering assistance to the region for 50 years, it was during the days of the Intifada that the network built by the ICCP and the United Nations reached the peak of its activity with over 1,300 organisations formally affiliated with the movement.

Many activists today wonder whether the strength of some NGOs has not dwindled following the signing of the 1993 Oslo Accord. Carmen Pauls from the Mennonite Church Central Committee in Jerusalem, who is also involved in humanitarian work, spoke of the waning spirit characterising some of the NGOs operating in the Occupied Territories today. "There is a loss of hope with the closure, the very fabric of the society is being torn apart, you don't feel the strength and energy and momentum of the Intifada so tangibly today". She added, "International NGOs who have local staff and Palestinian NGOs are developing a sophisticated set of coping skills to deal with crippling situations."

In any case, there were whispers at the conference that of the local NGOs in the Occupied Territories, the most outspoken and most radical were absent. The two-day meeting concentrated more on what international NGOs could do for and on behalf of local NGOs, rather than on the experiences of the Palestinian NGOs working in the Occupied Territories

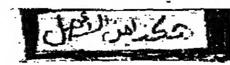
Betz urged international NGOs to "work in concert to offer the attentive public, particularly in the United States and Europe, another version of the history they presume to know so well"

Fiona McKay, a lawyer at Redress, a London-based NGO working on behalf of torture victims, reminded both international and Palestine-based NGOs that it remains necessary to lobby the international community for the enforcement of international human rights and humanitarian laws that are violated by Israel, even if such lobbying has not always produced the desired results. She pointed out that putting injustices into an international law framework can help NGOs fight them, first by providing a standard by which to criticise, and second, by giving them access to enforcement mechanisms which have not yet been used to their full potential.

Nabil Shaath, Minister of International Planning for the Palestinian Authority, made a plea to the participating NGOs not to despair, regardless of how frustrating things may be today. The suggestions in the NGO Plan of Action drawn up at the end of the two-day meeting included camping in endangered areas as a practical means of hindering the construction of settlements. Suggestions were also made that NGOs affiliated with Christian churches should launch a systematic information campaign directed at Christian pilgrims visiting the holy sites in order to acquaint them with the suffering of the Palestinian people.

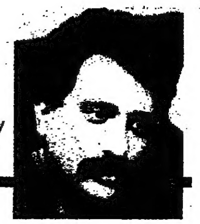
Pauls from the Mennonite Central Committee said that recently the Catholic Relief Services, which provide humanitarian relief in the Occupied Territories, were obliged to open a new office in Ramallah because they could no longer work out of Jerusalem. "What does it mean for an international NGO to say that it is so difficult to get our people into Jerusalem that we are going to open up an office in Ramallah? In some small way, it is giving up that hold on Jerusalem. But our office staff say that we should never move out of Jerusalem, ever. It becomes a story of uprootedness. And that is what the 50th aniversary of the dispossession of the Palestinian people is all about."

Edited by **Khaled Dawoud**



Exhausting the dream

Is 'Israelisation' an irreversible process? Is autonomy a solution? Azmi Bishara explains to **Graham Usher** why Palestinians still need a nation



Azmi Bishara is a member of the Knesset for the National Democratic Assembly (NDA) or Tajamu Party and chairman of the Palestinian NGO Muwatin, the Palestinian Institute for the Study of Democracy based in Ramallah.

In the last month, there have been two general strikes by the Palestinian Arabs in Israel and perhaps the worst confrontations between them and the Israeli police since Land Day in 1976 (when six Palestinians were killed in protests over Israel's land confiscation policies, ed.). How significant are these events? Do they represent a new phase in the struggle of the Arabs in Israel?

I hope they represent a new phase.

For the last decade, there has been a deterioration in Arab struggles for equality and national identity in Israel. I have called this process the marginalisation or 'Israelisation' of the Arabs in Israel. The process is one where, in certain circumstances, Arabs in Israel might accept less than full equality, in exchange for more political rights and a higher standard of living. They might accept less than their full national identity, if there is no longer an Arab national movement or a Palestinian national movement which they could identify with or feel attracted to.

Since 1996, we in the NDA have engaged in a lot of political work to reverse these trends, trying to deepen certain strains of political and cultural discourse among the Arabs in Israel around the issues of equality and national identity. I don't know if we have succeeded. But what has become clear to me in the last two years is that, on the question of Israeli land and demographic planning policies, there will be confrontation. Israel's policies in these fields are, very simply, racist. They see Arabs as obstacles in the way of what Israel calls 'Jewish distribution' of the land. When it comes to the land, Israel views Arabs as hostile, foreign elements usurping the land of the state.

So whether the recent protests are a new phase in the struggle or merely a passing wave is unclear because, given Israel's land and demographic policies, confrontations are inevitable anyway. But the fact that people came to the clashes with arms and fought to defend the land is significant. I tend to think they are a new phase. And as long as Israel doesn't change these policies — as long as it continues to take land for Jews only, rather than provide land for Jews and Arabs together — Um Sahili will not be the last clash.

I am not speaking as an academic here. As a politician, I can promise you that Israel's land and demographic planning policies are no longer acceptable and we won't allow them to continue.

But doesn't such resistance force you to revise the thesis of Israelisation? Aren't such protests expressions of at least a localised nationalism?

There can be no localised nationalism without a nation. And if we are not Arab Palestinians, then we are Muslims, Druze and Christians. We are an unorganised group of religious communities. This denouement is one of my worst fears for what might happen to the fabric of Arab society in Israel if the process of Israelisation continues. This is a real danger, because Israel does not give us an Israeli option. Israel does not recognise an Israeli nationality; it recognises only a Jewish nationality. If, in response to this, we give up on or are confused about our national identity, we will not move to a transnational or post-national identity. Nor, for sure, will we become Jews. We will become pre-national. We will become the minorities Israel wants us to become — Druze, Muslims, Christians — but not a nationality.

And we must become a nationality. National identity is the only modern identity; it is the identity of culture, the market and liberal democracy. And I want a local national project for the Arabs in Israel, but the precondition for this is that we belong to the Arab nation. I want a local national movement that is independent from the PLO. I have always wanted this because of certain political facts that obtain for Arabs in Israel.

The Arabs in Israel have special circumstances because they are Israeli citizens. This citizenship is seen by most Arabs in Israel as their most important asset. If a national movement here does not recognise this fact, it will always be marginal among them. It has to recognise this fact in order to reorganise the local national movement and the Arab national minority in Israel. If we don't do this, we will lose. And this is my project: to mobilise the Arabs in Israel both as citizens and as Arabs.

In the past, the Arabs in Israel [construed] their national identity on the basis of two pillars. One pillar was their exclusion from Israeli identity. Israel as an immigrant society was never a melting pot for its citizens; it was a melting pot for Jews. The second pillar was our attraction to an Arab national voice in the form of the PLO. Both these factors reinforced our sense of belonging to an Arab national identity.

In the last 20 years, both pillars have been shaken. First, Israel's exclusion policies ceased to be absolute. After Land Day in 1976, Israel became more stable. There was a rise in the living standards of the Arabs in Israel, an increase in our political and civil liberties. Due to economic developments over the last two decades, Israel became more liberal and we benefited from it. We earned more. We had more space to organise ourselves politically. We became more citizenised. We became more ambitious about how we wanted to be equal and with whom. In short, we became more Israeli.

Second, the project of Arab nationalism has lost. I do not mean it has lost in the long term — in the long term, I am still an Arab nationalist. I mean the existing Arab regimes and political projects are not attractive to us at all. Look around you. With which Arab regime can we identify? Then came the Oslo Accords and the reality of the Palestinian national project. It is truly tragic how this project turned out. How can a Palestinian in the Galilee identify with the Palestinian national project in Gaza?

Once these two pillars were shaken, it became clear that our national project lacked both conviction and aspiration. But aspirations are what give a people its identity. Sometimes people have to unite around an idea before they become a nationality — for example, the idea of sovereignty. So it became vital for us to have our own aspirations. One aspiration is for Israel to become a state for all its citizens, rather than a Jewish state. This is our aspiration and is what differentiates us from other Arabs. It is also an aspiration which contradicts Zionism and prevents the process of Israelisation. Our second aspiration is that Israel recognise us as an organised national minority and not as religious minorities. With these two aspirations, we can preserve our national identity.

You have advocated cultural autonomy for the Arabs in Israel. This demand has been rejected by Israel's Zionist parties. But it has also been rejected by Israel's Arab parties...

I raised the demand for cultural autonomy precisely to create this controversy. I wanted the Arabs in Israel to think about their future not as local communities, but as a national group. I believe cultural autonomy flows from the recognition of the Arabs in Israel as a national minority.

Cultural autonomy is not in contradiction with the demand that Israel become a state for all its citizens, though for some it may appear so. Why should it be in contradiction? The idea that equality means integration is a wholly Eurocentric idea. This may have been the way equality was achieved in France, but it doesn't have to be this way. And, in Israel, it cannot be this way. It is too late in Israel to "integrate" the two nationalities into one. There was an Arab nationality before Israel existed and this nationality persists and is being developed today. But Israel has succeeded — whether the Arabs like it or not — in creating a new nationality here. I do not call it a Jewish nationality; it is rather a local Israeli Jewish or Hebrew nationality, forged out of the Hebrew language, the army, the special Israeli experience and Israel's own aspiration to have a state.

These two nationalisms cannot now "merge" into one nation. We belong to our nation and they belong to theirs. The issue is what will be the relations between them. If one is a majority and the other a minority — and given that the majority will dominate the character of the state — then the only way that minority can be compensated is in a state for all its citizens. This means granting cultural autonomy to the minority. If there are no majority-minority relations, then the only alternative is a binational state. If the Occupied Territories remain with Israel, and the Palestinians there lose the option of establishing a national state in the West Bank and Gaza, then this vision need only be adapted to include them. If we have majority-minority relations, the state will be for all its citizens, enclosing the two nationalities within it. If we don't have these relations, then it is a binational state.

What parallels do you see between what has happened to the Palestinian Arabs in Israel and the political arrangements Israel is currently setting up in the Occupied Territories?

It is a complicated process. I do not think the question is one where either there will be a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza or, should this option fail, there will be the demand for a binational state. We are now in the phase of the Palestinian Authority (PA). It exists and there are political, economic and military elites wedded to it who want it to develop into a sovereignty. These elites want to arrogate more powers to themselves. This is typical of any national formation. And, because of this, most of the political and cultural process heads in that direction.

This is why there is no Palestinian party that today advocates quitting the project for a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza in favour of a binational state. The only controversy among the Palestinian parties — including the opposition parties — is over how to achieve a Palestinian state. The opposition believes its road is better than that adopted by the PA. In fact, the Palestinian opposition is even fiercer in its advocacy of an independent Palestinian state than the PA.

Given these realities, it seems to me that we will have to go through a "statist" phase in the form of bantustans, with more or fewer powers. And this phase will have to be driven to its very end, with the PA fighting for the next two or three years for Israel to implement its obligations under Oslo, exerting more pressure on Israel to yield more land, etc. But once the end is reached — once the PA reaches the peak of its development as a state — then the possibility for a binational option may arise.

The reason is obvious. You cannot have national independence and Jewish settlement. There will be either an open war to dismantle the settlements or a reconceptualisation of settlements in binationalist terms. Then the struggle for a separate Palestinian state would turn into a federated or confederated solution which says, fine, if Israel continues to settle in the West Bank and Gaza, then Palestinians have the right to settle across the Green Line.

But, before this, Palestinians will probably want to recover as much land as they can. And the lands they want to recover are Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem. But it is also now clear that they are not going to get these lands, neither with a Likud nor a Labour government. What Palestinians in the Occupied Territories will get is a state with citizenship and passports. But the state will be nominal only and the passports will be semi-passports. The substantive reality will be bantustans in around 40 to 60 per cent of the West Bank, but excluding the settlements, Jerusalem, water, and with no resolution of the refugee question.

The dream of a state, in other words, will not be exhausted before it is fulfilled. Once it is fulfilled — in the perverted form of bantustans — Palestinians will see what statehood means and what its limits are. They will remember that the national struggle was not just about statehood, but also liberation, and this is not liberation.

For the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, what do you see as the primary struggle? Is it the national struggle against Israeli occupation, or the democratic struggle against the militarisation of Palestinian society?

The two struggles are not contradictory. I still believe the primary struggle is the national struggle against Israel, especially over settlements, but also over Jerusalem, the prisoners, land and water — the national issues.

But if this struggle is really to pressure Israel and mobilise Palestinian opinion behind it, it must be realised through democratic institutions. Democratic institutions are not only ends in themselves. They are vital and pragmatic means to realise Palestinian nationalism.

Ours is one of the few national struggles in the Third World where sovereignty is not the condition for democracy, but democracy is the condition for sovereignty. And because Palestinians do not have sovereignty over the land, the only way we can express our sovereignty is through institutions. We have to find some way of expressing the people's will to the outside world, and the best way to do this is to institutionalise democracy.

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life



A play dealing with the role of the "new woman" in modern Egypt touched off a literary, artistic and professional controversy in 1913. The debate centred round the extent of freedom working and enlightened women should have. The play presented two contrasting types of working women to make its point; Dr Amina, an upright character who stands for marriage and family, and Susan, who maintained that her financial independence entitled her to absolute, unrestricted freedom. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** looks at the controversy on the basis of reports published by *Al-Ahram*

Illustration: Makram Haneln

"*Working Girls and Salon Girls* sparks heated debate over the meaning of the new woman," blazoned *Al-Ahram* on 29 May 1913. The headline marked the beginning of a literary and artistic battle that absorbed *Al-Ahram* readers throughout the summer of that year. It was a battle that took a few curious turns.

Working Girls and Salon Girls was the title of a play that had just been performed in the Printania Theatre the previous evening. "This modern play on a contemporary issue was written by Farah Anton, owner of *Al-Gamea* magazine, and presented by the illustrious George Abyad Theatre Troupe," announced *Al-Ahram*.

Writing under the pseudonym, "Al-Mutamassir" (the Egyptianised one), the reviewer of the play summarised what he thought to be the fundamental meaning of the play: "The moral liberation and advancement of women do not give them license to excess freedom and experimentation. In other words, should an Oriental woman behave in an immoderate and libertine manner, that is not the result of her personal liberty, but rather of corruption disguised as liberation. A woman can be a free agent who serves society without tainting her honour." The concept of a public spirited, but virtuous woman was represented in the play by the character of Dr Amina.

Dr Amina's antithesis was the type of woman who "camouflages her corruption under the pretense that she is a model of moral courage and an advocate of freeing Oriental womanhood from the fetters of ancient customs." Portraying this character was Susan Al-Fransawiya, "the leader of the working women who claim that their self-reliance and independence entitle them to absolute freedom with no restraints whatsoever on the dictates of their whims."

As was the custom in those days, the playwright distributed a handbill to theatre-goers outlining "the subject-matter of the play and the concept upon which it was constructed". Thus, Farah Anton explained that women were sometimes forced to undertake the tasks of men, "to safeguard themselves and their families and to protect themselves from falling to shame". Respectable women of the salons represented this category of female. In contrast, "girls on the street", as he put it, "trade in their beauty". This applied particularly to foreign women who, "with their special lure, enthrall the young men of the Orient, mesmerise their minds, take their money and keep them from marriage, which accounts for the marriage crisis people have been complaining about." The contrast between the two types of women was epitomised by the conflict between the extremist women's liberation movement of the "girls on the street" who formed a society to support Susan and moderate women's liberation movement which was headed by Dr Amina.

The play also cautioned against the effects of bad association on persons of good morals. Dr Amina stands for marriage and the family. Young men should abandon the "women of the streets" and return to the sanctity and comfort of the home. Embodying the depravity of men is the character of Dr Kubba. "This is the first time that the Egyptian stage presents the character of the Oriental libertine and womaniser, free of all internal and external restraint, deriving his strength from his brazenness and the gullibility of others."

Al-Mutamassir lauded the play, which pressed home its ideas "without the audience sensing that they were receiving instruction as though in a school. If Arabic drama continues to advance in this manner, it will serve as a higher centre of learning about the world for the young, as what they see on stage enables them to experience the wisdom of old age while they are still in their youth." Not all critics were as enthusiastic. However, before treating the controversy the play sparked, some background is in order regarding the theatre troupe and the playwright.

A year previously, on 21 March 1912, *Al-Ahram* welcomed home George Abyad whom "the khedive had sent on a study mission to the greatest drama schools in Europe where he proved his excellence in this art." When he returned to Egypt, George Abyad "formed a theatre troupe and, selecting the finest plays to present to the Egyptian audience, he demonstrated the fruits of his education, efforts and expertise." The troupe itself was made up of two components: "a group of literati or lawyers who had left their original profession, not as the result of failure or financial loss, but in the pursuit of the honour to serve their nation in a manner that is not yet fully appreciated by the general public, and a group of professional actors, whose natural talents have been honed by lengthy training under the tutelage of Sheikh Salama Hagazi and then perfected under their new director."

The troupe's first performance featured *Oedipus*, staged in the Royal Opera House and attended by the khedive in person.

While *Oedipus* was very successful, it was the opinion of several *Al-Ahram* readers involved in the "renaissance of drama" in Egypt that writers such as Farah Anton, who had Arabised the play, should compose plays "treating our own social conditions and moral issues. It would be highly worthwhile if the government used its means of persuasion to inspire these writers towards this end." The issue was also taken up by the French language newspaper *Le Progres* which asked, "Why is it that the theatres do not stage plays treating the morals and history of the people?" *Al-Ahram* replied that the reason was lack of funds. It would not be long before the hopes pinned on an indigenously produced Arabic play were realised with the production of *Working Girls and Salon Girls*.

In the interim, the George Abyad Troupe moved from strength to strength, expanding its repertoire and extending their performances outside Cairo. A second play that was highly successful was *Louis XIII*.

As would have been expected, the troupe's first performance outside Cairo took place in Alexandria. In a three-night gala, it staged *Oedipus*, *Louis XI* and *Othello*. Describing this unique event, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Alexandria wrote, "The theatre was so full that there was standing room only. Among the audience were princes, dignitaries and prominent men-of-letters whom no one had ever seen attending a performance of an Arabic play before. Everyone's eyes were transfixed upon the actors and how they personified their roles from the beginning of the play to the very end, so that the events and lessons of the plays became indelibly imprinted in their minds and hearts." Mansura and Tanta were also treated to similar gala performances, where they were greeted with equal ardour. Then, in the autumn of 1912, the troupe left Egypt for a tour of Algeria and Tunisia. It was when it returned in the spring of 1913 that George Abyad and Farah Anton began their collaboration on the first full-fledged Arabic play.

Working Girls and Salon Girls galvanised public opinion. The well-known Egyptian pediatrician, Dr Hafez Afifi, was one of the first to criticise the play. "The play in effect was the type of popular skit that is better performed in coffeehouse theatres, where the stage is set for singing and dancing," he wrote. Quickly, however, the writer arrives at his main point. The playwright had portrayed Egyptian practitioners of the medical profession as "drunks and degenerates" and the audience was made to understand that "these characteristics applied to all Egyptian doctors, thereby rendering them contemptible in the eyes of all."

Al-Ahram was not of like mind. "The play is equal in standard to the contemporary critical plays that are staged in the best theatres in France," it said. "Nor does the play contain any more embarrassing material than the ordinary plays we see these days."

George Abyad was quick to take advantage of the commotion stirred by the first Arabic play. Shortly after the opening performance, he published in advertisement which read, "*Working Girls and Salon Girls*, by Farah Anton and staged by the George Abyad Theatre Troupe last week, generated such high praise and sparked such harsh criticism that the administration of the troupe has resolved to stage a special performance of the play in the Printania Theatre on Monday. Tickets will be available at nominal prices to enable those who were unable to attend the first performance to determine for themselves that the play contains nothing that can be considered offensive."

Apparently, such was the outcry against the character of Dr Kubba, that the governor of Cairo was forced to intervene "in order to calm the tumult". The governor decreed that he would refuse permission for the play to be staged again unless certain alterations were made in the script. Kubba was stripped of his professional title and "Monsieur" substituted instead.

In *Al-Ahram* of 14 June 1913, Al-Mutamassir responded to this action. His response was quite acerbic: "A handful of physicians have made an uproar over "Working girls and salon girls" in the name of the honour of every doctor on the face of the earth, as though there were not among their colleagues, a few, or even many, of more deplorable character than Dr Kubba. Clearly they want to convince public opinion that doctors are flawless and made of the same substance as angels and saints."

Dr Abdel-Aziz Nazmi, a noted ophthalmologist and one of the founders of the Red Crescent Society (the Egyptian version of the Red Cross), declared that he was prepared, in the name of the medical profession, to enter into debate with Al-Mutamassir, on the condition that the latter revealed his true name, "so that each of us can know the identity of his adversary." Al-Mutamassir's response asked, "Even if he knew the identity of Al-Mutamassir, would that strengthen his argument in the debate, that is, if he wants to explore the facts and not wage an attack against a person? The issue under investigation is the comportment of some (not all) doctors, my good sir."

Nazmi was not to be put off. In a lengthy article published in *Al-Ahram* on 15 July 1913, he defended the medical profession against all charges. It was true that there were some exceptions to the rule, he argued. Certain doctors, for example, had made arrangements to have their patients purchase their medicines at particular pharmacists. But that did not necessarily imply a complicity at the patients' expense. He also denied that physicians had no mercy for the poor. "Indeed, many doctors treat the poor in their own clinics free of charge and, sometimes, pay for their patients' medicine and even go as far as to buy them food. However, these doctors do not bring in witnesses to testify to their good deeds. Rather they practise their charity for the poor out of the love of their work and their compassion for the ill."

It is interesting that the criticism of *Working Girls and Salon Girls* veered off into a debate involving the sensitivities of a particular profession. While many others joined in this debate, the play itself and its subject-matter had not been forgotten. For many years, the first Arabic play continued to be the subject of critical assessment, which serves as an indication of the healthy beginnings of this art in Egypt. At the beginning of the 20th century, as at the end, people involved in the theatre industry would watch the stage curtain close at midnight and wake up the following day to read the critique of the performance in the morning newspapers.



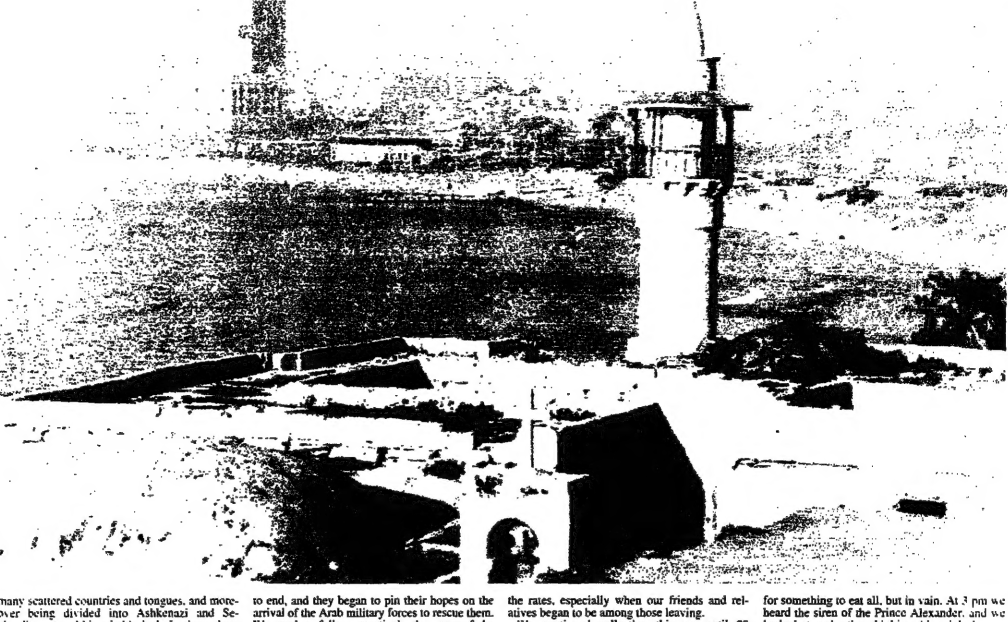
The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

Operation Chametz

Tiberias fell on 18 April, Haifa on the 23rd; then it was the turn of Jaffa, a city which was not included in the UN partition plan as part of the would-be State of Israel. Between 23 April and 13 May, the people of Jaffa fought desperately to save their town from the land grab of Plan Dalet and Operation Chametz to take over the city. Chametz means yeast in Hebrew. The Zionist offensive to occupy Jaffa, launched on 22 April 1948, coincided with the Jewish feast of Pesach (Passover). During the month preceding the Pesach, Jewish housewives are obliged to rid their households of any remnants of yeast (*chametz*) products. It was no coincidence,

After the matriculation

At first it seemed that the Zionists' assault on Jaffa could not succeed. But, as **Ibrahim Abu Lughod**, then a student in his final year of high school, recalls, the Palestinian population was *soon forced to realise* that the enemy had got the upper hand



Jaffa, 1998

photo: Hanan Shaath

On the eve of the UN Partition Resolution, Jaffa's Arab population numbered over 70,000. By and large they supported the traditional Palestinian leadership headed by Hajj Amin Al-Husseini, the Grand Mufti, though he himself had been exiled and was then residing in Cairo. To organise resistance, two members of the Arab Higher Committee, Sheikh Hassan Abou Al-Seoud and Rafiq Al-Tamimi, were sent to Jaffa to supervise the establishment of a National Committee. The composition of the Jaffa National Committee reflected the rather conservative leanings of the majority, though it did include some younger people who stood for less conservative trends. Besides the supporters of Hajj Amin, there was also a Christian representation and some elements from the City Council. The Mayor, Dr. Youssef Heikal, was excluded because he was considered to be an enemy of the traditional supporters of Hajj Amin, and a supporter of king Abdullah.

The formation of this committee represented a significant development in the attempt to fill the political vacuum left after the crushing of the 1936-1939 revolution. But it also reflected the belief that a decisive battle with the Zionists was approaching, though I do not think we realised just how decisive that battle was going to be.

The committee was provisionally located in Sahat Al-Sa'a [the square where the clock stands] near an old Ottoman building called the palace, which was once a court. During November the Committee moved for security reasons to another headquarters in the neighbourhood of Ajami, where the French Ambassador to Israel now lives. Many students volunteered to work with the Committee.

I myself was then a student at Al-Amriya secondary school in my final year, preparing for the matriculation exam. I still remember raging debates with our teachers, and especially with our history teacher, Zohdi Jar-Allah. He was the first to predict that the Partition resolution would be passed in the UN, and he used to believe — though he did not say so in public — that we had to accept the resolution, as we would lose if we went to war with the armed Zionists.

Though we very much respected our history teacher, we used to think that said all this because he was a relative of Sheikh Hossam El-Din Jar-Allah, Sheikh Amin Al-Husseini's opponent ,who had obtained more votes than Hajj Amin in the elections for the post of the Grand Mufti, but was never appointed, as the British for their own political reasons chose to give the job to Hajj Amin.

Now, when I think of those days, I am inclined to think that the inhabitants of Jaffa in general believed — like most of their fellow Palestinians throughout the land — that the Palestinian was braver than the Jew and more capable of standing hardship. They thought that, as the country belonged to the Arabs, they were the ones who would defend their homeland with zeal and patriotism, which the Jews — being of many scattered countries and tongues, and moreover being divided into Ashkenazi and Sephardic — would inevitably lack. In short, there was a belief that the Jews were generally cowards. Thus the people of Jaffa, as well as the members of the National Committee, believed that if they made ready a bit, and if the British army did not interfere on the side of Jews, as it had done previously, then they were sure to emerge victorious.

They believed this, despite the fact that the National Committee had not succeeded in mobilising people or in finding a substantial number who were willing to engage in military action, and despite the fact that the results of the first encounters between the Arabs and the Jews had not been promising. Indeed, the Jewish forces were quickly able to establish most of the areas bordering on the Jewish quarters as no man's land, and the majority of the Arab inhabitants in those areas had to relocate to safer parts. This did not directly lead to any deterioration in Arab morale during the first few weeks, as everyone was too busy following reports of the battles and the destruction, analysing the situation and drawing lessons, while the local press kept reassuring them that all would turn out well. However, insights into the true gravity of our situation did begin gradually to emerge.

During the first three weeks following the UN Partition Resolution people began to evacuate the frontline district, and by the end of December 1947 all these areas had become a no man's land. Those who had had to leave their homes began to adapt to the new situation, renting or squatting houses that had been deserted by their owners when they fled the city to safety. Those who remained began to wonder when all this was going to end, and they began to pin their hopes on the arrival of the Arab military forces to rescue them. We used to follow attentively the news of the delegations that were dispatched to Damascus (the headquarters of the military committee formed by the Arab League), or to Cairo, or to Amman to talk to King Abdullah.

At the beginning, those who left Jaffa were the affluent. They were ashamed of their desertion, and gave various excuses for leaving, such as that they were going to Cairo for a honeymoon (my family squatted in a flat of a newly-wed couple who never returned from their honeymoon); that they were having to go abroad for medical treatment or for some other personal emergency; and so on. We young ones used to view these people with disdain and talk about how typical their desertion was of the behaviour of the rich and well-to-do.

On 24 January, the Palestinian Education Council announced that the Palestine Matriculation Examination would start on 30 March, rather than in June as usual. After the exams ended and we were free, some of the students volunteered to work for the National Committee. The committee had decided to levy a tax on every family who insisted on leaving. With my two friends Safiq Al-Hout and Mohamed Lasawi, I worked in a branch of the committee based in the headquarters of the Muslim Youth Association near the port of Jaffa. Our job consisted mainly of harassing people to dissuade them from leaving, and when they insisted, we would begin bargaining over what they should pay, according to how much luggage they were carrying with them and how many members of the family there were. At first we set the taxes high. Then as the situation deteriorated, we reduced the rates, especially when our friends and relatives began to be among those leaving.

We continued collecting this tax until 23 April, when the combined force of the Haganah and the Irgun succeeded in defeating the Arab forces stationed in the Manshiya quarter adjacent to Southern Tel-Aviv. On that day, as we realised that an attack on the centre of Jaffa was imminent, I and my family decided that they had to be evacuated temporarily. We rented a van, into which we crammed all the women and young children and sent them to Nablus. I and my elder brother Yehia remained behind to "defend" our city.

Life had become very difficult for those who remained, and people were getting more desperate by the day, with no leadership to guide them.

Leaving the city had become difficult, as the Haganah had cut the land road, and the only way out was the sea with all its risks. Then on 3 May word began to spread – until this day I do not know how, as there were no press, and the radio was not the source for that item of news — that the last ship that would be making a humanitarian relief mission, a Belgian ship called the Prince Alexander, was in the port ready to take whoever wanted to leave. My friend Shafiq Al-Hout had already left for Lebanon with his family. By then there was only myself. Mohamed Lassawi and a third friend from the old city left. The three of us went to the port, taking nothing with us. We got on the barge which was carrying luggage out to the ships standing out to sea one kilometre away from the port. In 15 minutes we reached the ship, but at the last moment we felt ashamed of our desertion and decided to turn back to the port. We stayed on the barge. We spent the whole afternoon searching for something to eat all, but in vain. At 3 pm we heard the siren of the Prince Alexander, and we looked at each other thinking this might be our last opportunity. We ran swiftly to the barge and returned to the ship. At 3.30p.m on Monday 3 May, 1948, we set sail for Beirut. A day after our departure, Dr. Youssef Heikal, the Mayor of Jaffa, left for Amman where he reported that not a single Arab remained in Jaffa. On 10 May, however, according to the Associated Press, there were still 2,000 Arabs out of the more than 70,000 in the city.

I arrived in Beirut on 4 May. I believed that we would be returning to Jaffa in a couple of weeks. But it was in Nablus, while sitting idly in a café one day in July 1948, that I heard the results of the Palestine Matriculation Examination broadcast over Radio Israel. I and my friend Shafiq Al-Hout had passed the exam. I sent him a cable in Beirut, and armed with the Matriculation he was able to enroll at the American University in Beirut. I, for my part, left for America, where my certificate reached me by mail in December 1949, thus enabling me to pursue my education there. The next time I saw Jaffa was on 8 Dec. 1991. In the company of Mohamed Ma'ri, then a member of the Knesset, I inspected every street, alleyway, school and market. Though Jaffa is my city, I could not help feeling that the life that runs through its veins today is a very different life from the one that I had lived.

An expanded Arabic version of this article will be appearing soon in a special issue of the Ramallah-based periodical Al-Karmel *commemorating 50 years of Arab dispossession.*

Ghost city

Abdel-Qader Yassin, veteran Palestinian political activist, recounts his last sight of Jaffa in 1948

"On the night the UN issued the partition resolution, fires and demonstrations broke out across Jaffa. Everything changed. Since then nothing has ever been the same. I was ten years old at the time and I had four sisters and an infant brother. My parents, together with the rest of our family, decided to leave the neighbourhood where we used to live, El-Manshia, which was now on the front line, as we were very close to Tel Aviv. We moved to a hotel downtown called El-Inshirah and stayed there for around four months until the fighting broke out again in April.

"The Jewish families who were close to the front line retreated then too. So there was a void that was immediately filled by the fighters from both sides. From the night we departed El-Manshia till the time the fighting started again, Jaffa was like a ghost city.

"Tel Aviv was the major point of Jewish convergence. It was the headquarters of the Jewish Agency and the Zionist leadership. Limited fighting broke out from time to time between the Arabs and the Jews, but it was always contained. Before the partition resolution, it was common for the Arabs to visit Tel Aviv. But once the resolution was announced, everything changed: instead of normal life, there was mutual boycott and two warring parties.

"The partition resolution was like a war signal. Even though Jaffa was not included in the would-be Israeli state, we knew the Zionist gangs would not stick to the declared borders. Being so close to Tel Aviv was another factor that intimidated most of the fleeing families, who were expecting a fierce Jewish assault. I remember visiting El-Manshia with my father three days after the partition resolution and seeing three Haganah fighters dressed in black crawling towards the Arab quarter. They were beaten back by Arab fighters, but anyone could see that a war was coming, even before the Haganah launched its attack against Jaffa in April.

"On later visits, some of my fathers' friends who had remained in El-Manshia told us how the Arab fighters suffered from lack of ammunition. Each fighter had only five bullets. The machine guns they used were either the British-made 303s or Italian ones brought from Egypt's Western desert by the National Committee in Jaffa.

"I used to read the three daily Jaffa-based Arabic papers: *Al-Defa'a* (Defence), *Phalestine* (Palestine) and *Al-Sha'ab* (The People). It was evident from the material they published and from what I heard from the older people, that the balance of power favoured the Jews. They had advanced weapons, well-trained fighters and ample ammunition. The Arabs, on the other hand, were running out of everything. To make things worse, the British troops handed over their military camps to the Zionists prior to their departure from Palestine.

"My father, like many Palestinians, didn't join the Arab fighters simply because there weren't enough weapons. The vast majority of fighters used to buy their weapons with their own money, as the Palestinian political leadership could not afford to supply us. On top of that, most of the available weapons were really old.

"Nevertheless, morale in Jaffa was quite high. Despite the scarcity of weapons and ammunition, victory seemed very close at certain points. It was so close that on 19 March, America's UN representative asked the UN to cancel the partition resolution, because he felt that the Jews might be defeated. But on 9 April the Jewish gangs deliberately committed the Deir Yassin massacre to demoralise the Arabs, and it worked.

"We all heard about the massacre. I remember that I read extensive coverage of the horrors in our press, which republished a story from the *New York Times*. Besides this terrifying news, the Arabs in Jaffa feared they would not be able to defend their honour if they were attacked by the Jews. They were afraid that their women would be subject to the humiliation of Deir Yassin. I was young, but I sensed just how much this worried the people in Jaffa. Having four sisters was enough reason for us to leave, as the Jews considered everything and everyone in the villages they invaded as theirs.

"When the Zionists launched their onslaught on Jaffa, they surrounded it on three sides, leaving the fourth, which was the port, free. Then they bombarded us with mines, as Menachem Beigin later admitted in his book, *The Revolt*.

When the shelling began, everyone rushed to the port, including my family. I can still remember the noise of the bombs, getting closer and closer to the port, as the weak Arab defence gradually collapsed.

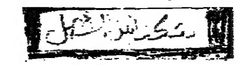
"When we left Jaffa, we all thought we'd return when the Arab armies liberated our land. The scene of that departure is still clear in my mind. Thousands gathered at the port and the only thing that could absorb this huge number were the barges that were used for transporting the ships' goods. We were packed into hundreds of these small barges like sardines and took off. Some went to Egypt, like my family, and others sailed to Gaza. I recall that Jaffa had 70,000 inhabitants. After the Jewish offensive, only 5,000 remained.

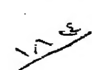
"In Egypt, all the Palestinian refugees followed the news day by day, and it was my daily task to read the papers for the illiterate. I remember reading that those who had remained were besieged in the neighbourhood of Ajami and were prevented from restoring their destroyed homes. Later on, as more Palestinians flocked to Egypt, we were told that when the Jewish gangs entered the Arab quarter after the fall of Jaffa, they slaughtered a number of innocent and unarmed civilians. Those who managed to stay alive did so only by playing dead among the corpses, so that the Jews wouldn't notice them. Once the Jewish fighters walked away, the Palestinians ran to the port and took the first boat or ship they saw.

"I never visited my home in Jaffa again. Many of those who wanted to see their homes after 1976 couldn't do so. The Jewish families who had occupied their homes denied them entry, so they died of grief. But I don't want to die."

Interview by ***Amira Howeidy***

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

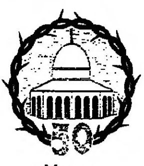




هكذا من الأصل

therefore, that the Haganah dubbed its drive to expel the Arab inhabitants of Jaffa "Operation Chametz". The codename signified exactly what the operation intended: an ethnic cleansing of the Arabs.

The Arab inhabitants of Jaffa numbered around 70,000. The Arab fighters trying to hold back the Jewish attack were 450 of the city's inhabitants, beside another 300 fighters from the Arab Liberation Army formed by the Arab League. Jaffa was in a most vulnerable position because of its proximity to Tel Aviv, where the largest Jewish population (170,000) was based. Tel Aviv was also the base for the Haganah's Kiryati Brigade, with its 3,000 fighters; 15km south-east of Jaffa the Haganah's Givati brigade, with an equal number of fighters, was stationed. The Arabs fought desperately for 10 days, but on 3 May, the Arab commander in charge of the defence of the city, Michel Al-Issa, cabled to the Arab League Military Committee in Damascus: "There are no forces left to defend the city. All the inhabitants have already left. The British authorities advise that Jaffa is declared an open city." A few days later, there were only 500 Arabs left in Jaffa



Years of dispossession

Jaffa: Land of oranges

By Ghassan Kanafani



• Born in Acre in 1936. Lived in Jaffa where he received a French education. Left Jaffa in 1948, first for Lebanon then Syria and Kuwait.
• Moved to Beirut in 1961, where he wrote novels, short stories, political articles and edited *Al-Hadaf*, the organ of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Appointed official spokesman of the Popular Front in 1970.
• Was blown up in a car explosion, which also killed his niece, in July 1972. Amid the wreckage a scrap of paper from the Israeli Embassy in Copenhagen was found, a reminder of the fate awaiting those who fought Israel.

When we had to leave Jaffa for Acre there was no sense of tragedy. It felt like an annual trip to spend the feast in another city. Our days in Acre did not seem unusual: perhaps, being young, I was even enjoying myself since the move exempted me from school... Whatever, on the night of the big attack on Acre the picture became clearer. That was a cruel night, passed between the stern silence of the men and the invocations of the women. My peers, you and I, were too young to understand what the whole story was about. On that night, though, certain threads of that story became clearer. In the morning, and as the Jews withdrew threatening and fulminating, a big van was parked in front of our door. Light things, mainly sleeping items, were being chucked into the truck swiftly and hysterically.

As I stood leaning against the ancient wall of the house I saw your mother getting into the van, then your aunt, then the young ones, then your father began to chuck you and your siblings into the car and on top of the luggage. Then he snatched me from the corner, where I was standing and, lifting me on top of his head, he put me into the cage-like metal luggage compartment above the driver's cabin, where I found my brother Riad sitting quietly. The vehicle drove off before I could settle into a comfortable position. Acre was disappearing bit by bit in the folds of the up-hill roads leading to Rass El-Naqoura [Lebanon].

It was somewhat cloudy and a sense of coldness was seeping into my body. Riad, with his back propped against the luggage and his legs on the edge of the metal compartment, was sitting very quietly, gazing into the distance. I was sitting silently with my chin between my knees and my arms folded over them. One after the other, orange orchards streamed past, and the vehicle was panting upward on a wet earth... In the distance the sound of gun-shots sounded like a farewell salute.

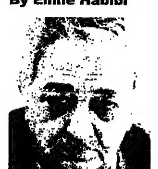
Rass El-Naqoura loomed on the horizon, wrapped in a blue haze, and the vehicle suddenly stopped. The women emerged from amid the luggage, stepped down and went over to an orange vendor sitting by the wayside. As the women walked back with the oranges, the sound of their sobs reached us. Only then did oranges seem to me something dear, that each of these big, clean fruits was something to be cherished... Your father alighted from beside the driver, took an orange, gazed at it silently, then began to weep like a helpless child.

In Rass El-Naqoura our vehicle stood beside many similar vehicles. The men began to hand in their weapons to the policemen who were there for that purpose. Then it was our turn. I saw pistols and machine guns thrown onto a big table, saw the long line of big vehicles coming into Lebanon on the winding roads, leaving the land of oranges far behind, and then I too cried bitterly. Your mother was still silently gazing at the oranges, and all the orange trees your father had left behind to the Jews glowed in his eyes... As if all those clean trees which he had bought one by one were mirrored in his face. And in his eyes tears, which he could not help hiding in front of the officer at the police station, were shining.

When in the afternoon we reached Sidon we had become refugees.

Haifa: Wadi Al-Nisnass & Abbas Street

By Emile Habibi



• Born in Haifa in August, 1921, where he remained until his death in May 1996.
• Joined the Communist Party in the 1940s and was member of the Israeli Knesset from 1953-1972.
• Began writing short stories in the 1960s, and was editor-in-chief of the Communist Party's Arabic newspaper, *Al-Ittihad*, in the 1970s. Resigned from the Knesset in 1972 to write his first novel: *Saeed the Pessoptimist*, depicting the life and fortunes of an Arab citizen of the state of Israel. Published in 1974, it was an instant success, and remains one of the greatest of modern Arabic novels.

I claim to be one of those who cannot see the moon except for its luminous side. It is thus I find justification for those Jewish friends with sensitive souls who claim they do not believe it when we declare that we want a lasting peace based on a Palestinian state alongside an Israeli one. I find excuses for their mistrust, telling myself and my people that perhaps their suspicion of our intentions comes from their sense of guilt at everything they have committed against us, expressed once in Moshe Dayan's phrase: "If we were in their place..."

There is no place for "if" in actual history. However, if you want to argue using such logic, then I would say that if we were in your place we would not have allowed our reactionary forces to do to you what your forces of reaction have done to us. Furthermore, I would add that if you combined all the "ifs" in all the languages of the world, you would be unable to justify a single harm — not even the minutest — that you have wreaked on what you call "the other people"...

Umm Wadie was unable to overcome the shock of those days [1948]. By then her life was behind her, and most of her sons and grandchildren were scattered in the diaspora. Once she came down to the premises of our old political club in Wadi Al-Nisnass to participate in a joint Arab-Jewish women's meeting. Those were days of a raging general election campaign. The Jewish speaker was emphasising our struggle for the rights of the Palestinian refugees to return to their homes. Umm Wadie interrupted her saying: "Will my sons and daughters return?"

Taken aback, the Jewish-Hungarian speaker replied: "They will return when peace is achieved." "Lies," shouted Umm Wadie, "my son Emile never lies to me. He told me that their return — if ever they return — will take a long time. By then I won't be here to see them: I'll be in my grave."

Ever since that meeting, and without me knowing, it became her custom to go secretly to a corner of Abbas Garden near our house. She would lean against a stone shaded by an olive tree and bemoan her destiny — lonely and separated from her children, especially the youngest son Naim.

"Naim, where are you now? What has happened to you without me?"

Little did I know of her newly acquired habit until one day I overheard my two daughters playing at being Granny Umm Wadie bemoaning "O Naim".

That year Umm Wadie left us, crossing the Mandelbaum Gate on her way to her children who had taken refuge in Damascus. It was there, in Damascus, and not in Shafa Amre [her native village, now part of Israel] that her soul returned to its maker.

"As for you, you can stay. Your life is before you, and you can afford to wait until they return."

Those were the last words of my mother, Umm Wadie, when we parted on the Israeli side of the Mandelbaum Gate.

I remained. I returned to Haifa and wrote my very first story as a citizen of the State of Israel. It was entitled "Mandelbaum Gate".

And I remained. But, until this day, and for as long as I live, I think of my mother as having remained with me, for mothers are of the roots.

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In our neighbourhood [Abbas Street in Haifa], the search for those Arab women who [after leaving in 1948] had smuggled themselves in along with their children never ceased. Those women of the neighbourhood who were registered used to take shifts at the bottom of the neighbourhood staircase to alert the rest whenever there was a search raid...

Among the residents of the neighbourhood were two Jewish women, one Polish married to a Pole, the other from Tiberias, also married to a Pole. The latter spoke Arabic like a native — indeed, she was a native. She was humourous... and, when it was her shift... used to alert everyone in a mock-Polish accented Arabic. As for the Polish woman, she tried her hardest to give her Arabic the intonations of an Arab from the tribe of the Prophet Mohammed. Her name was Masha, and her husband's name was Leon. They had a daughter, the same age as my children, whom Masha used to take along to her vigil at the bottom of the staircase... The child would run up the stairs, alerting the hunted women so that they would run carrying their children to the Abbas Garden. I allow myself here to divulge the names of Masha and her husband because they couldn't bear to remain in our ill-fated alley, nor could they bear to be with us and yet segregated from us. They left the country and emigrated to Canada. As for the woman from Tiberias and her Polish husband, I keep their names hidden in my innermost soul. She was the one who insisted at the beginning of every raid that the hunted women and their children should hide in her house. The women would reply: "No, our good neighbour. Enough what we are suffering. Why should you and your children suffer too? At least when we hide in Mount Karmel, they won't be able to harm a tree or a stone we hid behind."

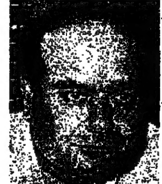
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One summer evening in 1995, I returned to my house in Nazareth to find a female voice recorded on my answering machine. Masha and her husband Leon were staying with a friend in a house... near Tel Aviv. She was speaking in English, and she asked me to try and phone them soon before their return to Canada. I immediately called the number she had left on the answering machine and, giving my name, asked to speak to Masha or Leon. He came to the telephone first, and informed me, in English, that they were on their way back to Canada that same night and that they had tried to reach me several times but got no reply at my home. In a tremulous voice, he insisted that I should visit them in Canada, as soon as possible, then passed Masha on to me. Her voice sounded as if she was weeping. She pleaded with me to visit them as soon as possible in Canada, before her husband's imminent death. I didn't wish to tell her that I was in the same boat as her husband, and promised that we would meet soon.

Our neighbour from Tiberias had already died, having buried her husband. Although my children and their children had grown up together, it would seem that life made them drift apart — I, for one, would rather not think of any other reasons for the total break of communication between our offspring.

Tiberias: Sea of miracles

By Anis Sayigh



• Born in Tiberias in 1931. Was in boarding school in Jerusalem when Tiberias fell and his family had to leave the city.
• Received his undergraduate education at the American University in Beirut, and his Ph.D in political studies at Cambridge.
• Wrote more than 20 books on the history of the Arab world and the question of Palestine.
• Editor-in-chief of the monthly magazine *Palestinian Affairs* (1971-1981), and director of the PLO's Research Centre in Beirut (1966-1976).
• The target of three Israeli assasination attempts, one of them a letter bomb, in 1972, which left him blind.
• Presently resides in Beirut.

Thirty years ago I was on a flight from London to New York. To ward off the tedium of conversation with unknown fellow-travellers I had taken a book along. But here was an American man in the seat beside me and Americans abroad chatter incessantly...

Turning to me, the American man said: "I am So and So, from Such and Such a state."

"And I am So and So, from Tiberias," I answered.

Naturally, he took no note of my name, which is unrecognisable to foreign ears. But Tiberias rang a bell, though he couldn't remember where and when he'd heard it.

"Where is Tiberias?"

"It's a town in Palestine."

"Palestine?" he asked in astonishment.

"Yes. The country you [Americans] helped usurp and where you founded a state you call Israel."

"Oh, Israel. Right. Now I know where it is. But where exactly is Tiberias in Israel?"

"It's on the west bank of Lake Tiberias, or what you call in English the Sea of Galilee."

"I know I have read about Tiberias, but my memory fails me. Would you remind me of the famous figures associated with it?"

"Christ, for one, came to Tiberias. He wandered along its shores, walked on its waters and did not drown. He made miracles in Tiberias, fed the multitudes with two or three fishes. There, at His cry, the swine from Trans Jordan became mad and ran to their death. He healed the blind, raised the paralysed and turned the fishermen into philosophers and exegetists."

He nodded in agreement for he had recalled. Then he asked: "And who are its famous citizens?"

"There was Peter, the chief apostle of Christ and His most loved disciple. And ... and..."

I went on to enumerate the names of 11 out of the 12 disciples, all of whom were from Tiberias and its environs. Only one among the dozen was from Jerusalem — Judas Iscariot, who betrayed his master and sold him to the Jews for 30 pieces of silver."

He was a very insistent neighbour, prodding me for more names of famous figures. I recited names of Romans, Muslims, Jews and Crusaders who were either born in Tiberias or lived there. He just couldn't get enough and kept asking for more... but I had run out of names. I knew I had to dredge up some name with which to end the litany, before we could both fall silent.

Finally, I said: "Anis Sayigh."

"I've never heard that name before. Could you please spell it out for me so that I can look it up in the *Encyclopedia Americana*. There's not one famous person who's not in it."

I said: "S-A-Y-I-G-H."



The refugees who in 1948 flooded the Gaza Strip from all over Palestine had two links with the outside world: the narrow road through the 200 miles of the Sinai Desert to Cairo, and the Mediterranean Sea. Both links were cut off by the 1967 war. The photo shows Palestinians leaving the Gaza Strip on small fishing boats *(photo: UNRWA)*

He pulled his diary out of his pocket, jotted down the letters which he intoned aloud to make sure he got them right: "S-A-Y-I-G-H."...

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Ours was the last house to the north of the town. From there the road took you to Safad and Umoum, in the north of Palestine. Only a kilometre away from the house is a series of some of the most important archaeological, touristic and Christian sites, among them Al-Tabgha and Kafr Nahoum. There you find scenic vistas where the sea meets the land in stretches that are neither land nor sea: when the tide flows, they become sea; when it ebbs, land. Sugar-cane stalks, reeds and papyrus cover them. Monks and nuns tend them and look after the thousands of visitors from all over the world. I confess here, and for the first time, that Al-Tabgha and Kafr Nahoum surpass Tiberias in beauty. Because they were under the supervision of Catholic monasteries while we are Protestants, we rarely visited... but whenever we had guests we would make that an excuse to go with them to these marine paradises...

I see that green strip of trees between our house and the seashore where the Lido, the most famous and certainly the classiest establishment in north Palestine, once stood. This was built in the 30s by a German man called Grossman. During the war, the British charged him with Nazi sympathies and threw him in prison where he committed suicide. Then the Jews took over the Lido and changed its name, in revenge against Grossman. One of the things I remember is that Grossman had a sign at the entrance which said, in Arabic, English and German, literally: "Dogs and Jews Forbidden on the Premises."...

Our gardener was the brother of the gardener at the Lido, so our family and the Grossmans used to trade flowers and compare notes about them, and on feast days we'd exchange gifts with them. I, of course, used to get the lion's share of the lovely German toys and clothes, being the youngest son, and therefore spoilt rotten by everyone, even the Nazis. Indeed, the Grossmans, the hospital doctors..., the minister and the Scottish Protestants — all used to call me "the little minister" because, like my father, I am plump and have a rotund face set in a big head, though obviously I was not, at the time, bald like my father. The sobriquet did not bother me at all because it guaranteed that I would get most of the nice presents. What did cause me distress was that people always pinched my cheeks by way of greeting, particularly during visits. How I envied my brothers their lean cheeks which nobody ever pinched...

... Adjoining our house inland was Yakfi; an elegant villa built by a Scottish (or maybe Australian, I can no longer remember) retired missionary called Miss Varten. Some of the simple townswomen used to call her El-Sitt Miss Varten. My father, who for reasons unknown to me, mistrusted her, used to say that she was Armenian and that her real name was Vartanian but that she had changed it to claim she was Scottish or Australian and therefore blue-blooded.

Miss Varten had two infirm, elderly women living with her who in their youth used to help her spread the word. One of them, Sitt Mariam, was a Sunni Muslim from Syria, while the other, Sitt Saadi, was a Druz from 'Ebiah, Lebanon. They had both converted to Christianity long before we met them, and in fact before they came to live in Yakfi as Miss Varten's guests. With the passing of time Miss Varten died, followed by Mariam, and Saadi was left alone. She was poor, and my mother felt sorry for her, so she invited her to have lunch with us every day of the year. But Saadi was so frail and sickly that she couldn't come and go on her own. My brother Mounir and I used to take shifts going over to the villa to collect and then escort her back. Sitt Saadi's only worldly possession was a gold watch.

Whenever I went to fetch Sitt Saadi she would say she had willed her watch to me after her death, as an expression of gratitude and I'd be overjoyed, only to discover that the following day she had said the same thing to my brother Mounir on his shift. So it was that, between Mounir and Anis, the promise of the watch alternated 360 times a year. Then Saadi died while we were away at boarding schools (Mounir in Beirut, I in Jerusalem). I still do not know to whom the watch fell — exactly like Palestine, promised us but lost in a moment of forgetfulness, to become Israel.

The Arabic sources for the above texts are: Kanafani's short story "The Land of the Sad Oranges", collected in his Complete Works, Beirut, 1975; Special issue of *Masharif* magazine, founded by Emile Habibi, commemorating the first anniversary of his death, Haifa, May 1997; and Anis Sayigh's book *13 September*, Beirut, 1994. All texts were translated from Arabic by **Mona Anis** and **Hala Halim**.

Al-Ahram Weekly

30 April - 6 May 1998

Elusive Somali reconciliation

The precarious Somali power-sharing and peace agreement concluded in Cairo must still overcome constant factional strife, writes **Gamal Nkrumah**

Somalia has been without a central government since the overthrow of the late Somali President Mohamed Siad Barre in 1991. The country has been torn apart by factional fighting. And lately, in spite of determined mediation efforts by Egypt and neighbouring African countries, the bloodletting has flared anew. The main reason is that many Somali leaders and foreign arms dealers stand to lose enormous profits if the war comes to an end. State coffers have long since been emptied, but arms dealers and tribal chiefs are making a quick killing out of war. The sad irony is that Somalia's factional leaders are among the richest men in Africa.

Egypt and the Inter-Governmental Authority on Drought and Development (IGADD) — a grouping of seven east African countries — have spearheaded the Somali reconciliation process. IGADD delegated Ethiopia to oversee the Somali reconciliation process, but Egypt has played a key role in bringing factional leaders together. Last 26 December, Somali factional leaders signed a *power-sharing agreement in Cairo*. A planned reconciliation conference in the strategic central city of Baidoa has been postponed several times in the past few months. However, meetings are scheduled for Rome and Nairobi to iron out differences between Somali leaders.

But who are the most powerful of these leaders and what are their political agendas? One, Ali Mahdi Mohamed, has tried in vain to reunite the National Salvation Council (NSC), a grouping of 26 factions set up in January 1997 after talks in Sidere — a mountain resort town on the outskirts of the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa. Another leader, *Hussein Aidid, inherited the chairmanship* of the United Somali Congress-Somali National Alliance (USC-SNA) from his late father General Mohamed Farah Aidid. The USC-SNA is dominated by members of the Habr-Gedir clan of the Hawiye tribe — Somalia's largest *tribal confederation. The NSC, which* includes important non-Hawiye leaders, is a powerful coalition of key Somali factional and tribal groupings. Its raison d'être until the Cairo declaration was confronting the Aidid faction.

The two Hawiye leaders came under the spotlight recently when they brokered the release of 10 foreign aid workers who were kidnapped on 15 April. The two leaders said that the hostages' release last Friday was arranged by "traditional channels" and that no ransom had been paid — a claim confirmed by the International Committee of the Red Cross. But Hassan Ali, one of the hostage takers, told reporters that $100,000 had been given to local militias to free the hostages. However, the most controversial aspect of the kidnapping was the dubious role played by the international media in sensationalising the incident and, in the process, endangering the lives of the hostages.

"We were all treated relatively well. The most tense moment was created when an international camera team *forced its way into the compound where* we were kept after apparently paying off our kidnappers. The foreign camera team forced its entrance and actually urged the kidnappers to treat us roughly and incited them to create the most dramatic effect for the camera," explained Tehmas Gurtner, a Swiss national, and the only freed hostage to address a news conference in Nairobi after his release. World Television Network (WTN) and Associated Press Television (APTV) were the only two foreign camera teams to film inside the hostage compound.

Kidnappers scare the daylights out of everyone, and when international cam*eramen zoom in on hardened militiamen* torturing hapless hostages the world watches and the international media makes more money.

It is in this context that the international media exaggerates differences between Egypt and Ethiopia over So*malia. The Cairo declaration is* widely seen as a personal triumph for Aidid and for the Hawiye tribe in general. There is strong resentment of Hawiye hegemony and a fear that the reconciliation of the Hawiye leaders, Aidid and Ali Mahdi Mohamed, came at the expense of smaller tribal groupings. After the Cairo declaration, Mohamed appears to some of his non-Hawiye NSC partners to have betrayed their cause by siding with Aidid, his fellow Hawiye tribesman.

Barre's Marehan tribe which monopolised key army positions before Barre's demise are hostile to Hawiye domination — a view shared by influential tribal leaders of the Darod tribe such as General Omer Haji Mohamed, leader of the Somali National Front (SNF), and his rival General Aden Abdullahi Nur Gabyow, leader of the Somali Patriotic Movement (SPM). The SPM is an alliance of two powerful Darod clans — the Majerten and the Marehan. However, the two clans have been engaged in fierce fighting for the war-torn southern port of Kismayo. General Mohamed Said Hirsi, Kismayo's mayor and a deputy of General Gabyow has long pointed an accusing finger at Aidid and the Egyptian government for instigating violence in Kismayo, but both the Egyptian authorities and Aidid deny any involvement.

Gabyow and Colonel Abdullah Yusuf Ahmed, stormed out of the Cairo reconciliation talks only to surface in Addis Ababa and announce that they rejected the Cairo declaration.

They both belong to the powerful Darod tribe which feels marginalised by the political dominance of the Hawiye tribe and especially by the new legitimacy the *Cairo declaration gave Somalia's* two most powerful Hawiye leaders — Aidid and Mohamed.

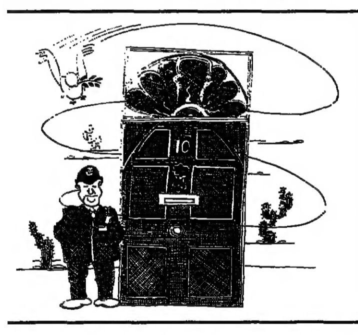
Egypt's Deputy Assistant Foreign Minister for African Bilateral Relations Ambassador Faiza Abul-Naga told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that, "the most important point to remember is that Egypt is one of the few countries actually to have an ambassador, Mahmoud Mostafa, posted in *Mogadishu. That in itself* is a remarkable symbolic gesture as it signals the importance Egypt attaches to its relations with Somalia. Egypt has deep historical, cultural and religious ties with Somalia and nobody has the right to insist that Somali reconciliation efforts have to take place exclusively within the confines of a single country or a single regional or international organisation."

Referring to the rejection of the Cairo peace accords by some Darod tribal leaders, Abul-Naga responded, "We are not anti-Darod. We are for a reconciliation of all Somalis. The Somali ambassador to Egypt Abdallah Hassan *is himself a Darod from the Ogaden.* Of the 28 Somali leaders who came for the Somali peace and reconciliation accord preparatory meeting, seven were Darod leaders. It is true, two left, but the five others remained to sign the Cairo accords."

The SNF's General Haji Mohamed is a close ally of Ethiopia and his forces have been fighting the forces of the Is*lamist Al-Itihad Al-Islami* in the southern Somali region of Gedo. Ethiopia sounded the alarm bells a couple of years ago when it warned that Al-Itihad Al-Islami is instigating sectarian strife which threatens the security and national interests of Ethiopia. Indeed, in August 1996, Ethiopian troops crossed the Ethiopian-Somali border and chased Al-Itihad Al-Islami fighters deep into their Gedo stronghold. The SNF joined forces with the Ethiopians then, but it seems that without Ethiopian military intervention, the SNF was unable to hold on to territory it captured from Al-Itihad Al-Islami and has recently suf*fered severe military setbacks as a re*sult. There is much speculation as to whether Ethiopia will once again intervene militarily to save its Somali allies. All hopes are now pinned on more peace and reconciliation talks in Rome, Nairobi, and Baidoa.



Last Friday, a naturalised American Somali, two Swiss, a Norwegian, a German, a Belgian, a French nurse, a Kenyan, a South African and a Somali were released in the Somali capital Mogadishu. The ten hostages were kidnapped *on 15 April by gunmen in northern Mogadishu. Eight of the re*cently released hostages are Red Cross workers. The Kenyan and South African are pilots. Factional leaders Ali Mahdi Mohamed and Hussein Aidid worked together for the release of the hostages through traditional channels. The Red Cross claims that no ransom was paid, but at least one of the hostage-takers denied this *(photo:AFP)*





FATHI



Russia's new Prime Minister Sergei Kiriyenko

Duma votes for Kiriyenko and cars

Facing the threat of dissolution, the Duma bows to Yeltsin's demands, writes **Abdel-Malek Khalil** from Moscow

The Russian parliament — the Duma — ended the country's latest political crisis by confirming Sergei Kiriyenko as the country's new prime minister. Friday's vote was 251-25 in favour of Kiriyenko, a 35-year-old economist and former minister of energy. Kiriyenko is widely seen as an inexperienced *newcomer by the country's political* heavyweights.

Many in the opposition, led by the Communist Party, abstained from the vote as a final gesture of protest. Russian parliamentarians had rejected Kiriyenko twice in the past two weeks. But Russian President Boris Yeltsin had the upper hand in an almost comical battle of wills, buttressed by Russia's constitution which gives the president the right to disband parliament if it rejects his candidate three times.

A day after the Duma confirmed *Kiriyenko as prime minister, former* Premier Viktor Chernomyrdin, booted out by Yeltsin in a sweeping government reshuffle last month, pledged to support the new government and asked his Our Home is Russia Party to comply with Yeltsin's wishes. "We will support everything reasonable coming from the authorities," Chernomyrdin said in an opening address to the fifth congress of his political party. Chernomyrdin, however, asked parliament to support him in his bid to replace Yeltsin in the next presidential *elections, scheduled for 2000.*

Both Chernomyrdin's Our Home is Russia Party and the right-wing ultranationalist Liberal Democratic Party, headed by Vladimir Zhirinovsky, stabbed the Communists in the back, fearing the near certainty that Yeltsin would respond to a third rejection of Kiriyenko by disbanding the Duma and calling new general elections.

Some analysts believe that Yeltsin got rid of Chernomyrdin because he wanted to prove that no one in Russia can challenge him. Yeltsin, who is fond of sacking ministers, has once again proved that he, like the tsars of old, rules Russia with an iron fist.

Only a year ago, Yeltsin brought in a group of "young reformers" to *clean up Russia's economic mess,* but dismissed the entire cabinet last month, claiming they had failed to produce tangible results. Kiriyenko has not yet detailed any plan of action to rescue the ailing Russian economy. But as a strong proponent of radical free-market policies, he is popular with the Russian business community. Kiriyenko served as a private banker and an oil company executive in Russia's third largest city, Nizhny Novgorod, before joining the government a year ago.

"Your objective is to bring about *economic growth. It was precisely* such an understanding that the previous government lacked," a stern-faced Yeltsin told Kiriyenko after the parliamentary vote. "We need concrete actions to move toward a stable economy," conceded a sheepish Kiriyenko. Observers believe that Yeltsin deliberately chose the inexperienced but energetic and youthful technocrat to push through drastic measures and sweeping economic reforms. Kiriyenko, however, will be facing a hostile parliament, controlled by the Communist Party and other opposition groups, who are determined to stop the steady erosion of social welfare services.

The Communists want to increase government spending to help Russia's hard-pressed millions. They also want to see increased state spending for the struggling public sector. Kiriyenko promised to cut government spending instead.

Yeltsin and Kiriyenko want a new tax code to streamline Russia's current complicated and punitive tax system. Yeltsin also wants land reform that will make it easier to buy and sell property and wants to privatise a number of large state-run industries as well.

The Duma fought Yeltsin's choice to the bitter end, but financial considerations won the day. Alluding to the perks parliament members stood to lose along with their jobs, Russia's influential *Moskovsky Komsomolets* newspaper poured scorn on what it regarded as "spineless" parliamentarians. In a strongly-worded editorial bitterly criticising the state of affairs in the country, the newspaper said, "The deputies saved the Motherland, their apartments and cars."

Tutsi blood on French hands

Executions of former Hutu leaders have begun in Rwanda. But the call for justice goes beyond the continent of Africa, writes **Faiza Rady**, as an inquiry in Paris seeks to implicate the Mitterrand administration

Four years after the former Hutu-controlled Rwandan government embarked upon the massacre of an estimated one million ethnic Tutsis and their Hutu "collaborators", 'justice' has finally been done. Twenty-two Hutu leaders — accused and convicted of being among the masterminds behind *the genocide* — were executed last Friday.

Hundreds of thousands of survivors, who lost relatives in the bloodshed, gathered to witness the executions in the Rwandan capital Kigali and in the cities of Gikongoro, Nyamata, Murambi and Cyasemakamba. In Nyamata, the crowd cheered as the body of Gabriel Wachawaseme was riddled with bullets by the execution squad. Commemorating the thousands of victims slaughtered by Wachawaseme and his infamous cohorts, one man shouted: "Wachawaseme was killed. This is a lesson. *This is right.*"

At the Kigali football field where Froduald Kamira had once spread his message of hate, inciting Hutus to exterminate the Tutsis — including their children — tens of thousands watched him die along with three fellow ideologues of Hutu supremacy. Kamira, former vice-president of the fascist Democratic Republican Movement (DRM), was convicted of helping plan and carry out the 1994 genocide. Of the 330 people tried in Rwanda *for* genocide, 116 have been convicted and sentenced to death and one-third have been sentenced to life imprisonment. Meanwhile, more than 125,000 people are still awaiting trial.

The international community and some northern human rights organisations were quick to condemn the executions. Still embarrassed by the immediate withdrawal of UN peace-keeping forces just as the massacre was beginning on 6 April 1994, and the UN's subsequent refusal to intervene in time to put an end to the bloodshed, Secretary-General Kofi Annan adopted a moderate tone — only urging Rwandan President Pasteur Bizimungu to ensure that "justice be done in accordance with due process." In Washington, State Department Spokesman James P. Rubin said the United States was concerned that the *defendants* were not given access to a proper defence or appeal, while the Pope expressed "sadness" for the executions.

Responding to the mounting criticism, Minister of State Patrick Mazimhaka explained that the death penalty has been used in Rwanda for over a century, first by the Belgian colonial authorities, and by the Hutu majority government for crimes "that pale in comparison". "I didn't hear the Pope ask for forgiveness then," said Mazimhaka. Anne-Marie, a Tutsi survivor, railed at the criticism, reported the French daily *Le Monde*. "I hear that Europeans are concerned about the fate of these prisoners. Do you know, do you have any idea of what was done to us here? I lost my husband and three children. The [Hutu] militia men ordered my 19-year-old son to rape me. He refused and they executed him." Rwandan human rights activist Jean-Bosco Iyamuremye also supports the executions. "I always rejected the death penalty. But for those responsible of genocide, I take a different stand. We have to eradicate the ideology of genocide."

Based on a racist hate campaign, the dissemination of this ideology was facilitated by the Tutsis' compromised historical legacy. They had been rejected by many Hutus since their collaboration with Belgian imperialism in the late 1800s. Praised by the Belgians as superior to the Hutus, the Tutsis assimilated this identity which defined them as "foreign", with a distinctly superior racial make-up. The Tutsis assisted the Belgians in governing the country, serving both foreign capital and the interests of their narrow class base.

Consequently, when the Hutus came to power in the late 1950s, many Tutsis were executed for collaboration — while others sought refuge in neighbouring countries. Those who remained after independence were long regarded as a fifth column, *potentially subservient to foreign powers. The eth*nic divide survived, inspiring and fueling Hutu extremism.

The fascist radio station FRTH (Free Radio of the Thousand Hills), that was instrumental in *sparking* the massacres, actually borrowed its message from European racism. Also known as *radio machete*, FRTH incited the Hutus to kill the minority Tutsis, denounced as allegedly "alien" occupiers of the land of Ethiopian origins. According to FRTH, the "foreign" Tutsis aimed to dispossess the poor of their small plots of land and re-establish their oppressive minority rule. Exploiting deep-seated psychological anxieties based on the hated imperialist legacy and playing on the real fear of land confiscation, FRTH propaganda had a profound impact. It called on all patriotic Hutus to defend their country against the enemy from "within" and "kill everybody, even the children". When the massacre began, broadcasters enjoined people to "work harder" and ensure that the mass graves would be filled with enough bodies.

Throughout the massacres, FRTH continued to transmit racist propaganda, until the fall of Kigali when the Tutsi guerrilla army, the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF), liberated the country from fascist control.

As the trial of national war criminals proceeds — albeit at a slow pace — the administration of President Bizimungu and a number of human rights organisations have accused the French administration under President François Mitterrand of having unconditionally supported and armed the government of then President Juvenal Habyarimana, while being fully aware of the impending massacre. In response to these allegations, a French parliamentary commission has started hearings to investigate the extent of the Mitterrand administration's involvement. Testifying last Tuesday, former Prime Minister Edouard Balladur rejected all personal responsibility and instead implicated the president's foreign policy in Rwanda which, he said, dated back to the early 1980s.

Many analysts believe that the Mitterrand administration's close ties to Rwanda were in effect considerably strengthened in the early 1990s, when Rwanda became a major buyer of French arms, ranking fourth among African countries in terms of sales volume. In 1990 the exiled Tutsis, who had been denied the right to return for three *decades, established a guerrilla movement and* took up arms. As a result of the civil war, which started that year with repeated incursions by the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) from their base in Uganda, the French moved in as military advisers, technical support personnel and even combatants of the Rwandan Armed Forces (RAF).

"Between 1990 and 1994, the French military mission, baptised operation *Noroît, channeled* tons of arms to Kigali, guarded the airport, maintained assault helicopters and took over broadcasting and the assembly of artillery. [*Noroît*] also supervised the army's 'security operations': roadblocks, checkpoints and the interrogation of suspects... [In 1992] a French officer..., Lieutenant-Colonel Maurin, became the commander of military operations in Rwanda," wrote *Le Monde*. Adding fuel to the fire, the French military also trained the infamous Hutu militias, the *Interahamwe* and *Impuzamugambi, which were to prove their murder*ous effectiveness at the forefront of the 1994 ethnic cleansing campaign.

Massacres notwithstanding, the collaboration continued unabated. *Le Monde* refers to six arms shipments totaling some $5,454,395 which the French armed forces made to Rwanda through Zaire between 19 April and 18 July. Moreover, France was the only country to recognise the extremist interim government and receive their officials. As the blood bath was raging in Rwanda, then Prime Minister Edouard Balladur and then Minister of Foreign Affairs Alain Jupé held official talks with Jérôme Bicamumpaka and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, two of the regime's leading theoreticians. To make matters worse after 6 April and for five long weeks, the French UN delegation collaborated with the Rwandans in denying the daily killings. While UN Security Council resolutions condemning the atrocities were vetoed by France, the French army provided assistance and protection to the RAF troops supervising the massacre. Between April and June, the French objective was to continue supplying the RAF with sufficient arms. According to *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Mitterrand's main concern was to help them defeat the "Anglo-Saxon" Uganda-based RPF, trained and armed by the US, a competitor in the race for hegemony in Africa.



British business comes to Egypt

With a high-powered joint council just announced, British and Egyptian companies prepare to get down to business. Aziza Sami reports

British Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit to Cairo this month, although brief, underscored the increasing importance attached by Egypt and the United Kingdom to bilateral economic ties.

The visit saw the formation of a high-powered Egyptian British Business Council and the signing of a preliminary $220 million mega-project by the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation and British Gas.

"Joint projects are important in terms of the messages they send to British business," said Andrew Henderson, the British Embassy's head of the Commercial and Aid Section. "The projects also show British companies that this is a country where major contracts are available and can be won — with opportunities for investment and expansion all across the board."

Total British investments in Egypt amount to more than one billion pounds sterling, making the UK the second largest non-Arab investor in Egypt after the United States.

Britain was one of the earliest investors in Egypt, coming in at the onset of the open-door policy of the mid 1970s — mostly with direct investments, and with an emphasis on engineering, construction and infrastructure projects, specifically in water and waste management.

Over the past couple of years, new British companies have come into the market such as Cadbury's. The automakers Jaguar, Rolls Royce, and Lucas have made investments, with Lucas setting up a manufacturing plant potentially geared to exports.

A consortium led by Kvaerner UK is currently undertaking the building of Media City and the Toshka Pumping Station, with British engineering companies involved as well in extending Nile irrigation water to the Sinai peninsula. Flemings Bank and ING Barings are currently investing in the Egyptian capital market.

Yet, the Export Forum — a body established by the Labour government to review export policies — ranks Egypt as one of its "top ten regional markets worldwide" where British businesses can noticeably expand their operations based on demographics, state of the economy and the extent of market penetration by British companies.

No projects are being negotiated as yet by the new Egyptian British Business Council, but the council is expected to oversee opportunities in new sectors of the economy which are becoming increasingly open to foreign investments such as power generation, road and airport projects, plus consumer goods and pharmaceuticals.

The British side of the council includes prominent businessmen, all of whom represent companies already doing business in Egypt. They include Stephen Green, chairman of HSBC Investment Bank, Sir Peter de la Billiere of Flemings, Frank Chapman, executive director of British Gas, Lord Stone of Blackheath, managing director of Marks and Spencer and Phil Watts, group managing director of Shell. The Egyptian side is still being formed, and will include businessmen involved in dealings with the UK.

"Over the next year, there will be an increased level of activity in terms of promoting Egypt as a market for British products and services," predicted Henderson.

One important step would be to get small and medium-sized companies to work in Egypt. Henderson said there is a lot of focus in Britain on small and medium enterprises. However, since it is difficult to persuade them to come to markets with which they are unfamiliar, the British government is looking to assist them through projects undertaken by multinational companies such as British Gas.

Henderson added that the British government is also concerned with assuring British investors that the Egyptian economy has changed dramatically since the late 1980s. Nevertheless, British commercial representatives must struggle against lingering negative images of a bureaucratic and red-tape-riddled Egyptian economy.

Striding towards the future: Tony Blair with Prime Minister El-Ganzouri *photo: Toni Fares*

"There is a need for British companies inside the UK to realise the changes that have taken place," said Henderson. "Because once you have a [negative] image in your mind, it takes a lot to remove it and so one of the key things we are trying to get across to the UK is that Egypt is a very large, normal market with many opportunities."

Another task before the council is the question of intellectual property rights. Pharmaceutical investments could become an issue of contention between both sides. The Egyptian government has announced it will not implement patent laws before the GATT-prescribed grace period which ends in 2005 — specifically in the pharmaceuticals sector. The Egyptian pharmaceuticals sector currently provides 95 per cent of local consumption at reasonable prices.

Yet with Glaxo Wellcome being Britain's single largest investment in Egypt, the company, along with other multinationals, is lobbying the government for immediate implementation of patent laws.

The Egyptian government, however, prefers to go slow — citing the need to weigh liberalisation against the social costs of reform.

Another task facing the Egyptian side of the council will be that of boosting Egyptian exports to the British market. The overall trade balance currently tilts in favour of the UK. In 1997, British exports to Egypt rose by 16 per cent, while Egyptian exports to the UK declined by 4 per cent.

One task facing Egyptian businesses through the Business Council would be to study the export opportunities to the British market, and means to boost such exports.

"The market in the UK is still open to agricultural and non-traditional Egyptian exports," said Henderson. "There is also potential for oil and gas, as well as engineering products. We hope this is one of the things which will flow from the Business Council."

Egyptians in Greece

GREEK Minister for Labour and Social Affairs Militadis Papayonou visited Cairo last week to discuss procedures regulating the status of Egyptian workers in his country.

Papayonou's visit, during which he met with Minister of Labour and Immigration Ahmed El-Ammawi, came as Athens began setting guidelines for foreign labour in Greece. According to Egyptian Labour Ministry records, there are 50,000 Egyptian workers in Greece out of a total foreign labour force of 60,000.

Last November the Greek government declared that every foreign worker must fill out an application, specifying details about his job and employer, in order to be given a temporary licence allowing him to live in Greece.

During his visit, which ended on 26 April, Papayonou said that 22,000 Egyptian workers had filled out the applications thus far. He expected that by the end of May, which marks the end of the grace period granted all foreign labour in Greece, the number will increase.

Abdel-Qader El-Asser, a counsellor at the Egyptian Labour Ministry, said that by the end of the grace period foreign workers residing illegally in Greece could be deported.

Egypt-Saudi venture

EGYPT and Saudi Arabia recently set up their first joint insurance company with an initial capital of $2.7 million.

The LE4 billion Egyptian National Insurance Company, ENI, will own 40 per cent of the newly-created National Saudi-Egyptian Insurance Company with 60 per cent in Saudi hands.

The establishment of the new firm was announced at a ceremony attended by Egypt's Economy Minister Youssef Boutros Ghali. The deal was signed by Saudi Prince Ahmed Ibn Bandar Al-Saud and Mohamed Shazli, director of ENI.

The headquarters of the new company will be in Bahrain while the main branch will be in Riyadh. Two branches are being established in Jeddah and Dammam.

Ghali underlined the importance of establishing such companies to encourage joint Arab ventures in the future. Prince Ahmed acquired ENI's representation rights four years ago and since then, he said, it has become the leading insurance company in Riyadh.

Powering ahead

Private capital will soon venture into the field of producing and selling energy. Sherine Nasr examines some electrifying prospects

Negotiations to construct the first private-owned power station in Egypt are now almost complete. "Under the BOOT [Build, Operate, Own and Transfer] system, a $420m power station will soon be built at Sidi Krir," Maher Abaza, minister of electricity, declared at a luncheon hosted by the American Chamber of Commerce in Egypt this week.

Private capital has lately begun to play a part in many infrastructure projects. Major companies are now able to build roads and airports as well as harbours. Yet the government has been highly sceptical about using the same model for energy production projects. "It was only last year that the government seriously considered allowing private capital to enter the field," said Abaza, who explained that power generation projects are capital-intensive and that the finance was usually provided through grants and soft loans. "But why spend $600m on building a power station if we can apply the BOOT system whose virtues have been recognised worldwide?"

According to Abaza, the BOOT system was introduced for infrastructure projects as an appropriate way for the government to mitigate foreign debts and enhance its programme of economic reform.

The Sidi Krir power station was put out to international tender, and the Ministry of Electricity received at least 54 serious offers. Eventually, Intergen/Bechtel were chosen to enter detailed negotiations. "The number [of offers] was quite a surprise for me. It indicates how much respect international companies have for the Egyptian economy. It also reflects the feeling of political stability in the country," he commented.

"From now on, new power stations will all be built by the private sector, and the seven existing electricity companies will be gradually privatised," he said.

According to Abaza, the government will still sell electricity to the public at the subsidised price of five piastres per kilowatt set for almost 98 per cent of consumers.

Further, an integrated seven-year plan has been set up by the government to implement another 15 power projects using the BOOT system for a total investment of $702 billion. "We are choosing the most strategic locations for the construction of these stations," said Abaza. Among them will be the Gulf of Suez, east of Tafriaa in Port Said, Safaga and Zaafarana on the Red Sea coast. "Once they are complete, the power produced by these 15 stations will be equal to the present power production of Egypt," he said. But that is not all: the process of building these stations will provide job opportunities for many Egyptians, as well as for the contracting companies that will carry out the construction work.

To encourage private capital to get involved, many important facilities will be provided by the government. "These companies will enjoy tax exemptions, currency conversion, repatriation of profits and they are protected against nationalisation. Moreover, a World Bank guarantee will be granted when required," said Abaza. To further facilitate their task, the Ministry has agreed to transfer and supply fuel for the projects at very attractive rates.

Fortunately, a good deal of the equipment for the power stations is now being manufactured locally. Two Egyptian companies specialise in producing condensers, boilers and generators at very reasonable prices. "This industry is growing fast in Egypt and we are quickly establishing ourselves as one of the few nations to produce such equipment," he said.

Meanwhile, Egypt is also being connected up with other Arab countries, as well as with Europe, through new huge international electrical networks. "One major project to connect Cairo, Jordan, Iraq and Turkey will be completed in 10 years time," said Abaza. The project is entirely financed by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development.

A link is also being created with Libya, which is already connected to the other countries of North Africa. And as of March 1999, Egypt will also be wired up to the European grid. "Now Egypt is not only able to produce but also to sell electricity to other countries," he said.

Pressed on why Egypt is prioritising the export of electricity when it has a reserve of 10 trillion cubic metres of natural gas, Abaza replied, "The added value of selling electricity is three times that of selling natural gas."

Ailing companies face privatisation

The appalling economic condition of a number of public sector consumer products companies were the subject of discussion at the People's Assembly economic committee last week. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

The People's Assembly's Economic Affairs Committee this week reviewed the economic conditions of 10 consumer products companies facing chronic financial imbalances, rampant mismanagement and huge unsold inventory. The committee concluded that privatisation may be the best solution to bail out the 10 companies.

Fuelling the parliamentary committee debates was a recent report submitted by the Central Auditing Agency (CAA). The report indicated that the 10 ailing companies not only suffer from a severe shortage of cash liquidity, but are also riddled with a staggering debt of over LE600 million resulting from overdraft borrowing from commercial banks, and unsold inventory valued at LE93.2 million.

In the light of these distressing facts, the Committee decided that these companies, fraught as they are with onerous problems and unlikely to survive in a free competitive market, should be slated for privatisation in the near future. The government has already announced plans to privatise some of these companies over the next few months.

The 10 ailing companies include five department stores and three firms involved in selling a mix of consumer products such as engineering goods, paper, chemicals and shoes. They also include two companies involved in wholesale trade activities.

According to the CAA report, which reviewed the financial condition of the 10 consumer products companies in fiscal year 1995/1996, the five department stores suffered from huge unsold inventory, inadequate marketing strategies, overdraft borrowing from banks and high costs of administrative and financial services. For example, Omar Effendi, a department store company affiliated to the Textile Manufacturing and Trade Holding Company, had unsold inventory of LE7.63 million in June 1996, 47 per cent more than in June 1995. Most of the unsold stock consisted of ready-made garments, blankets, upholstery and household appliances.

The CAA report also said that 23 out of 77 of Omar Effendi's branches throughout Egypt registered an increase by some 171 per cent in losses and overdraft borrowing from banks during the period from June 1995 to June 1996. The value of overdraft borrowing stood at LE90.5 million in June 1996, carrying an annual interest charge of LE8.8 million.

However, the CAA report stated that some LE213.1 million is owed by private and public clients to Omar Effendi company. The same observation applies to the Clothing and Consumer Products Company (Sednaoui). It was carrying debts of LE65 million to banks while itself being owed some LE84 million by clients.

Commenting on these facts, Abdel-Rahman Baraka, deputy chairman of the economic committee, said that the problems of public sector companies in general were largely due to the fact that they had evolved in an entirely uncompetitive environment for more than 30 years.

"We should ask ourselves why private companies involved in selling similar consumer products are successful and achieving good profits in both domestic and foreign markets. The answer is that the private sector has a good understanding of what competition means. It means ceaseless efforts to achieve higher quality, sophisticated strategies of marketing, catering to all kinds of taste, excellent promotion campaigns and application of modern methods in accounting and computing," Baraka said.

Other companies are suffering from different kinds of problems. For example, the United Wholesale Textiles and Articles Trading Company (UWTATC), an affiliate of the Holding Company for Spinning and Weaving, has been unable to strike a balance between its selling and purchasing policies. According to the report, UWTATC bought consumer products valued at as much as LE135.8 million in 1995/96. Out of these products, UWTATC was able to sell goods to a value of only LE127 million. As a result, the value of unsold inventory climbed to LE31.8 million over the period from June 1994 to June 1996. The report attributed the rise in UWTATC's unsold inventory to the stiff competition posed by rival private dealers.

The CAA report also painted a very bleak picture for the Egyptian Company For the Trade of Chemicals and Metals (Sigal), which suffered from unsold inventory valued at LE9.6 million and short-term losses of LE105.5 million. Sigal's 67 branches throughout Egypt made losses amounting to LE3.5 million in 1995/96, and overdraft borrowing from banks soared to LE80.9 million.

In a related context, the report said that the Bata Shoes Company was riddled with debts of LE3.3 million and unsold inventory valued at LE25.6 million in June 1996.

Presented with these distressing figures during the economic committee's debates, the chairmen of certain companies claimed that conditions have considerably improved over the past two years. For example, the chairman of the Modern Fashion Department Stores Company told the committee that he had been able to reduce unsold inventory from a value of LE19 million to LE15 million in one year and achieve a net financial surplus of LE1.8 million. "I know that some might see these achievements as modest. This is true, but you have to realise that we cannot take radical steps when every few weeks we hear that the companies will soon be slated for privatisation," he said.

Market report

CIB stirs things up

COMMERCIAL International Bank's 21 April decision to postpone its planned capital increase for three months pending further deliberations had a marked impact on transactions in the Egyptian capital market.

News last month that CIB planned to increase its capital from LE500 million to LE750 million stirred up the market this month, with the bank's transactions accounting for comparatively higher stakes in overall market transactions. Transactions on bank shares accounted for 16.8 per cent of the value of traded shares on the market through the week ending 23 April.

The postponed capital increase of LE250 million was to have been divided as follows: LE150 million worth of bonus shares to be distributed free of charge amongst shareholders and LE100 million to be offered through private placement to bank shareholders and staff at a discount price of LE15 per share.

The news had a negative effect on both domestic and international levels. This was mirrored by a LE4.43 decrease in share value and a 5.8 per cent decline in the bank's GDRs traded in the London stock exchange.

The general capital market index reversed its lengthy upward trend, losing about two points to close at 392 points. While most market experts blamed CIB shareholders for the plunge, they also said that the decline in the value of many shares came as a result of the profit distribution of their companies. After profit distribution, there is usually less willingness by investors to buy shares in anticipation of profits the following year. This was highlighted in the cement sector with most companies registering declines in share values.

However, active foreign demand has helped to ease the problem. Foreign buying orders amounted to LE72 million, compared to LE43 million worth of selling orders. Overall market transactions through the week totalled LE175 million.

On the other hand, Alexandria Spinning and Weaving topped the list of gainers, recording a 9.4 per cent increase to close at LE42.1.

Electronics giant expands ownership

A leading private electronics company is going public this week. Sherine Abdel-Razek reports

Three months after awarding one of its customers a promotional million-pound prize, International Electronics, IE, a leading household electronics manufacturer, is stealing the spotlight once again. The company, which has a 28 per cent stake in Egyptian TV sets, offered LE156 million worth of its shares through an international and domestic private placement. The offering consists of 2,943,000 shares, two million of which will be offered as a capital increase while the rest will be offered by existing shareholders. The offering price in both cases is around LE53.

With a projected earning growth of 16 per cent by the year 2001, the company's fair share value is LE63 which means that IE's shareholders will enjoy a capital gain of 19 per cent, said Ahmed El-Helw, managing director of Inter Capital Securities, the co-manager of the offering with British ING Barings. El-Helw said that projected investors of the issues are mainly investment funds, insurance companies and banks both in Egypt and abroad. Projected foreign markets are in the Middle East, the US and the UK.

The offering is considered the highest among previous similar issues of five private companies. All the five offerings were issued through private placement. Unlike public offerings, private placement companies normally target certain investors they would like to have as partners.

Sale proceeds will be used in increasing IE's capital in its four subsidiaries to 60 per cent in one and 99 per cent in the other three while the rest will be used in reducing the company's outstanding debts. The offering lasts for 10 days, ending Thursday, 30 April.

IE was established as part of Egyptian entrepreneur Ahmed Bahgat's business empire in the mid-eighties. Although it was the first private company to compete with public sector television producers, it recorded high growth rates on the way to becoming Egypt's leading television manufacturer. It expanded its activities through setting up subsidiaries for distribution and maintenance of IE's production.

Besides TV sets, IE produces video cassette recorders and recently started producing electronic medical equipment. In 1988, it acquired the representative rights to produce TV sets under the brand name of Korea's Goldstar. IE, which also assembles Grundig TV sets, signed a licensing agreement last week with another European consumer electronics manufacturer, Philips, to manufacture its products in Egypt.

The company produces TV sets under the names Prince and Goldi and for affordable prices to suit the low-income brackets in Egypt. But it is not only reasonable prices that make IE products popular. Extensive advertising and promotional campaigns reached their peak in Ramadan when IE announced a million-pound prize for the buyers of its TV sets during the holy month.

However a number of questions were raised during a press conference, organised last week by the Commercial International Investment Company, CIIC, which acts as a financial adviser to the offering. Yasser El-Malawani, managing director of CIIC, said that IE protectionist merit of a 50 per cent customs tariff on imported TV sets will be gradually reduced. According to the World Trade Organisation agreements, the tariff will be reduced to 30 per cent by the year 2001.

Because it is in the Sixth of October City, the company's 10-year tax break will expire the same year. Bahgat, IE's founder, its biggest shareholder and chairman, said that the company will compensate the lower protectionist level by the expected reduction in tariffs on imported components which account for 70 per cent of the cost of each produced unit. "This will eventually reduce the products' price and increase its competitive edge," Bahgat said.

While he admits that the tax burden might be heavy, Bahgat said it can be dealt with. "Transferring the company's plant to another site to enjoy a tax holiday could be a solution as it is less expensive than paying taxes for one year," he said. Factories built in new industrial zones such as the Sixth of October and 10 Ramadan cities enjoy tax holidays.

The high debt/equity ratio of eight is another source of concern raised at the conference. The company's financial statements show a total debt of LE300 million. However, Rana El-Adawi, head of research in Intercapital, attributed the huge debt volume to the fact that compliance with the international accounting standards means IE, as a holding company, has to publish the consolidated results of the four affiliates, not only its own results.

According to the CIIC report on the company, IE faces a risky year ahead when it begins phasing out the Goldstar brand name which is traditionally associated with IE products. South Korean authorities decided to replace the Goldstar brand with LG starting next year.

IE recently reached an agreement with the company to stop producing TV sets under the Goldstar name after 2000. Nevertheless, Bahgat believes that this is in favour of IE, which was obliged by the original agreement to import all components from Goldstar. He said that IE will now be able to adopt a more suitable procurement policy that will help reduce costs.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Al-Ahram Weekly

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Anything but hopeful

Of the numerous efforts made by the United States to achieve a breakthrough in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, the present attempt appears to be the most intensive. It is a multi-tiered drive spanning about three weeks and culminating in the 4 May London talks that US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright will hold separately with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Yasser Arafat. Judging by statements US officials made in recent days, there is a sense of desperation, if not despair, in Washington.

The current to and fro between Netanyahu and Arafat by US peace envoy Dennis Ross and Assistant Secretary of State Martin Indyk is the first phase of the American effort. Vice-President Al Gore will step into the fray next weekend as he tours the region just before the crucial London talks.

What has been happening on the Israeli scene does not bode well for the outcome. Even as Ross began his talks, a Netanyahu spokesman dismissed the US compromise proposal — accepted by Arafat — for Israeli withdrawal from 13.1 per cent of the West Bank as "totally unacceptable". Netanyahu has been threatening to annex parts of the West Bank should the Palestinians declare a state of their own in May 1999, the deadline set by Israeli-Palestinian accords for the peacemaking process.

In anther ominous sign, Netanyahu has been reported flirting with the extreme right-wing Moledet Party to draw it into his cabinet coalition. That party is not only opposed to any peace agreement with the Palestinians, but it also advocates the expulsion of all Arabs from "Eretz Israel". Last but not least, the Israeli cabinet has not yet made a final decision on the extent of redeployment it has in mind, widely reported to be nine per cent of the West Bank.

No wonder, then, that the Americans are pessimistic. "I think it's very hard to be optimistic and hopeful," said State Department spokesman James Rubin as Ross arrived in Jerusalem on Saturday. The following day, Albright said bluntly the peace process is in "grave danger... We have been going around in circles for far too long."

Short of heavy-handed US pressure, it is difficult to see what can be done to save the day.

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A creed for the future

The US is flying high. Egypt must secure its share, argues Mohamed Shafik Gabr

Around the globe, socialists are embracing capitalism and free market economies, governments are selling off companies only recently nationalised, and luring back foreign investment and multinationals that they condemned 25 years ago. State control and centralisation are being abandoned. The process of globalisation and the growing influence of the World Trade Organisation are visible markers of US success.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, US economic policy favoured a stronger government role in the market place (Nixon, a Republican president, imposed wage and price controls in 1971). US exports were underdeveloped and made no serious contribution to the growth of Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Today, under the leadership of a Democrat, even American liberals are embracing diminished government intervention. More importantly, they are promoting increased exports and integration into the global economy.

In early March, US President Bill Clinton spoke proudly of the achievements of the US economy during his leadership. Last year witnessed the US economy's best economic performance since 1990. Inflation fell from 4.3 per cent in 1990 to less than two per cent in 1997. Unemployment as a percentage of the labour force fell from 7.6 per cent in 1991 to 4.8 per cent in 1997. Real GDP witnessed an annual quarterly percentage change from less than 0.5 per cent in 1991 to 3.8 per cent in 1997. Moreover, for fiscal year 1997 (ending last September), the Federal budget deficit was $22 billion, down from $290 billion in 1992, when Clinton took over the presidency. The US is enjoying a "peace dividend" from the end of the Cold War. Defence spending in the early 1980s was six per cent of GDP; in 1998, it is expected to be half that figure.

Analysts predict continued growth of the US economy, along with lower unemployment and enhanced wages. However, on the list of US economic concerns is an expected slowdown of export growth and the impact of the "Asian crisis" on the possible inflow of Asian products to the US. America's support of the International Monetary Fund's programmes with Indonesia, Thailand and South Korea reflects this policy.

Another concern is the possible "cooling" of the seemingly unstoppable US stock market; the first slowdown in the longest period of American economic growth and prosperity since World War II.

It is against this backdrop that US economic policy towards, and engagement with, the Arab and Middle East region can be viewed.

US economic policy towards the countries of the Middle East and North Africa (the MENA countries), follows two distinct vectors. On the one hand, the US has bilateral relations with each country in the region, with the exception of three countries where sanctions are imposed. On the other hand, US economic policy to integrate Israel into the Arab Middle East is failing, due to the sorry state of the peace process. The Doha MENA conference failed to achieve the objectives stated in the original charter of the MENA meetings by a wide margin.

No alternative US-Middle East economic policy has been proposed. And although moderate Arab countries committed to regional peace and stability are making strides in developing market economies and liberalising, they have no new vision for strategic economic alliances that will attract large US investments and technological transfer.

In 1996, Clinton's Council of Economic Advisors developed a strategy of forecasting, studying and encouraging US interaction with what was termed "Big Emerging Markets" (BEM). Among all the countries in Africa, only South Africa qualified as one of the 10 BEMs that year. Now, a strategic shift has the US looking towards Africa as a continent of opportunity in 1998.

Today, the US is the world's dominant military power and a major economic powerhouse with four critical components of success: an immense focus on research and development; very high productivity levels, now enhanced with low energy costs; a strong, diverse and developing financial market; continual technological advances.

Egypt remains the cornerstone for peace and stability in the Middle East, and shoulders a critical leadership role in the Arab, Islamic, African and Mediterranean spheres. In 1997, the Egyptian economy saw a five per cent growth rate, inflation reduced to below eight per cent, and a budget deficit of around one per cent, which has put it in a position to effect the necessary groundwork to achieve sustainable economic growth and take-off.

The US-Egypt relationship is both political and strategic. A non-inclusive list of the benefits of the relationship to the US includes: trade surplus approaching $3 billion; an assistance programme that enhanced US exports and created new jobs in America; Egypt as a gateway for joint ventures to operate in third countries in the region.

Benefits to Egypt include an assistance programme that has improved infrastructure and other facets of the Egyptian economy; increased exports to the US and the benefit of competition; growing US investments. This year will witness the doubling of non-oil US investments, as American companies implement the first private sector power plant at Sidi Kreir (InterGen, a subsidiary of Bechtel) and the two telecom GSM licences (Air Touch in partnership with a company from the UK and Motorola with a French company).

In addition, the Egypt-US Economic Partnership Agreement, signed in April 1995, is both a challenge and an opportunity: a challenge because the Middle East as a whole is "out of focus", thus impacting on US investments in the region, as well as in Egypt, and an opportunity for both countries to benefit from the different competitive advantages of their economies.

Egypt is on the US economic radarscope. To ensure that it becomes an economic priority is a genuine challenge for both the Egyptian government and business leaders.

The writer is a member of the Egypt-US Presidents' Council and chairman of the Artoc Group.

The criterion: a Palestinian State [1]

As Israel celebrates its fiftieth anniversary, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed argues that the establishment of a Palestinian state is the real criterion by which progress in the Middle East peace process should be gauged

On 29 November 1947, the United Nations General Assembly passed its famous partition resolution calling for the division of Palestine into two states, one Arab, one Jewish, following the end of the British mandate on 15 May 1948. The Jewish side accepted the resolution and created the state of Israel; the Arab parties refused to implement it. Fifty years on, Israel's existence in the region is firmly established, while the creation of an independent Palestinian state remains tantalisingly out of reach.

At the same time, the creation of such a state is a precondition for any viable peace in the region. In the context of the ongoing peace process between the Israelis and the Palestinians, how can this precondition be satisfied? The establishment of a Palestinian state is the real criterion by which to determine the success or failure of the peace process: there can be no genuine, long-term resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict in the absence of a Palestinian state.

Any outcome that will not include a Palestinian state would be more likely to liquidate the Palestinian cause than to crown it with success. However, the opposite is not necessarily true: a Palestinian state is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the vindication of the Palestinian cause. Not any Palestinian state will automatically mean that the cause has been served. The Arab parties should have a strategy to guarantee that the creation of a Palestinian state in any foreseeable future will not be shrouded in unacceptable ambiguities. This might eventually entail a total reassessment of Arab strategy towards the Palestinian problem, the core issue of the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Actually, the establishment of a Palestinian state is not only a qualitative issue that involves combining certain ingredients to justify the claim that a Palestinian state exists, but also a quantitative issue, related to the dimensions of that state and the configuration of its frontiers, and not only what sovereign prerogatives and security safeguards it will enjoy.

It is worth noting in this respect that a number of prominent Israelis, such as Shimon Peres and Yossi Beilin, are now calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state, provided it remain demilitarised and without real sovereign prerogatives. They are joined in their call by leading Jewish figures outside Israel, notably in the United States. The problem is that a state is a state only if it enjoys full and unrestricted sovereignty, and calling an entity that does not enjoy such sovereignty a state is a sham. The advocates of a demilitarised Palestinian state divested of many of the prerogatives of sovereignty could argue that we are dealing with the fuzzy logic of politics, not the clear-cut contradictions of formal logic. The rationale here is to satisfy the Palestinians formally with a passport and a flag, while denying them real power and political parity with the state of Israel, as required under the provisions of the UN General Assembly's 1947 resolution.

The founding fathers of Zionism had contemptuously referred to Arab Palestine as 'a land without a people, waiting for a people without a land'. The unremitting resistance of the Palestinian people to the Israeli takeover of their land has proved the fallacy of this assertion. With their call for a demilitarised Palestinian state, Israeli and other Jewish advocates of the two-state solution are trying to make amends for this obviously crude Zionist statement, albeit less in the aim of responding to Palestinian aspirations for a genuine state of their own than of aborting Palestinian resistance.

Some Arab parties are also interested, for reasons of their own, in foiling the Palestinians' ambition to establish an independent state. One reason is that it will be difficult to reconcile sovereignty for the Palestinian state with its subordination to pan-Arabism. According to the tenets of pan-Arab ideology, the Palestinian issue concerns all the Arabs and not only the Palestinians. Accordingly, the latter are not entitled to have the final word on key decisions related to the Palestinian issue. Another reason is the difficulty of drawing a line of demarcation between the Kingdom of Jordan and the Palestinian Authority on a number of particularly touchy issues, not only in the West Bank, but more particularly concerning Arab and/or holy rights in East Jerusalem. True, Jordan has given up much of the previous prerogatives it enjoyed in the West Bank, but issues are much less clear when it comes to Jerusalem, all the more so with Israel's open practice of playing off the two Arab parties against one another.

In my article last week on Ulster, I mentioned that a basic premise of the peace agreement in Northern Ireland is that it will be put to referendums in the overwhelmingly Roman Catholic Irish Republic and in the mostly Protestant North. It will give the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland more political power and increase the influence of the Irish Republic in northern affairs. But it will also assure the Protestant majority that there will be no united Ireland unless it is approved by a majority, which is not likely to happen for decades to come. How can the mechanics of this agreement help overcome the difficulties in the way of finding a solution to the intractable Arab-Israeli conflict? Does the Irish agreement suggest the possibility of confederal (perhaps one day, federal) relations between Palestinians and Jordanians, or between Palestinians and Israelis, or between the three parties together, once all parties, the Palestinians included, will have acquired the right to enjoy full sovereignty and independence? These are questions that cannot be ignored when looking at the future of the area in a time-frame that could include the coming half-century.

So far, both Israel and the Arab states have tried to use the Palestinian cause, even the idea of a Palestinian state, to their own advantage. But despite their attempts, despite the deteriorating situation of the peace process, the cause remains vividly alive. It has been suggested that the idea of a Palestinian state is becoming obsolete with the growing tendency towards globalism, the consolidation of economic links and the further erosion of state sovereignty. Still, the Palestinian problem remains central to the Arab-Israeli dispute, and no permanent peace is conceivable without an equitable solution to the problem. Arab states cannot deal with the concept of a Palestinian state the way Israelis do. The fact that staunch advocates of the Israeli cause have themselves recognised the need for a Palestinian state should convince all Arab parties that they cannot afford to display less commitment to the idea of a Palestinian state than the adverse party.

In memory immortal

By Naguib Mahfouz

I am amazed that the 100th anniversary of the birth of Tawfiq El-Hakim should pass almost unnoticed. He was a pillar of modern Arabic literature, whose first play, *Ahl Al-Kahf* (The Cave People), introduced him as a master playwright. The play exploded into Arab cultural circles like a series of brilliant fireworks that continued to light up the sky long after the last sparks had fallen gently to earth. The literary landscape in the Arab world was never quite the same after this work. People who, like Abbas El-Aqqad, another icon of Arabic literature, never praised El-Hakim's later works, were almost speechless in admiration.

Personally, I was utterly stunned by the work. I immediately realised that a great artist had suddenly stepped into our world. After I read the play, I closely followed all his writings, and was equally impressed by his novel, *Awdat Al-Ruh* (Return of the Spirit) and his short stories. Tawfiq El-Hakim never let me down.

He was the source of all the streams nourishing our literary life. The way he expressed his unique ideas, left an indelible mark on an entire generation of readers. How could this centenary pass unnoticed? To forget Tawfiq El-Hakim, to disregard this momentous date, is shameful.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

To The Editor

Grass-roots are greener

Sir- I have just read the very interesting article by Mariz Tadros about Gourna (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 2-8 April). It is good to know that this most important subject is getting international publicity and onto the world's agenda, because Gourna is a World Heritage site.

It is not surprising that "the people of Gourna are confused, anxious and bitter". While national museums and private collections around the world display the plunder torn, excavated and shipped out of Gourna, it has been the local people and not the Europeans and Americans who have been called "tomb-robbers" and vilified for over 150 years. While most families live in traditional mud-brick houses without piped water and can ill afford a bicycle, it is the Europeans who live there in colonial isolation with all modern facilities or who come in huge belching coaches. Yet it is the villagers who are accused of not respecting their environment.

Between 1990 and 1994 a consultancy firm, on behalf of Luxor City Council, conducted the first stages of a major project involving a total house-by-house survey, grass-roots public participation and consultation. This resulted in generally acceptable plans for re-locating the communities in New Taref, away from the monument area.

The land was designated and people awaited the next stages — designing and building. Naturally there have always been some people who do not want to move from their family homes whatever the alternatives, and their wishes should be respected.

But since 1994, over 40 per cent of this special New Taref land has been built on by a private developer, who threw up hundreds of "chicken houses" that Gournis, quite understandably, don't want to live in. The opportunity to build what a large number of Gourna people had agreed to was lost. None of what they agreed to in 1994 has happened. Lots has happened that they have never agreed to or been consulted on. And then there was the massacre and the killings of January. Poor confused, anxious and bitter people of Gourna.

UNESCO recommends that local populations living in or near World Heritage Sites should be closely involved with their management and conservation. Gourna could become an example of what should be done, rather than a blood-soaked specimen of how not to do it. It is in the interest of everyone that the wonderful Luxor West Bank welcomes its visitors with the best of both ancient and modern Egyptian culture. The sadly quiet time since the massacre could give everyone a chance to take stock, look at the problems afresh and work towards solutions together.

Around the world it is clear that harnessing the energy, love and enthusiasm of local people who have local knowledge and providing any necessary additional knowledge and skills from outside is the way to solve problems like this. To impose from above is not sustainable — it is expensive and short term. It appears that there are many people in Gourna and in Cairo who are willing to give time and effort. Perhaps what is needed is a good mediator. Isn't there a former UN secretary-general about somewhere?

Caroline Simpson
Former director
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Canterbury
England

The other 50 years

Sir- I was pleased to learn about Edward Said's film project for the BBC ("Scenes from Palestine", *Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 March-1 April 1998). This side of Israel's 50th anniversary also needs to be widely told, and I applaud this effort. I hope that the BBC will make it readily available to networks in the US and elsewhere shortly after the premiere and that it will also soon be available in video format for purchase.

Congratulations to Edward Said, who is always provocative.

P Carpenter
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Sir- Edward Said's voice of reason, empathy for and knowledge of the Palestinian dilemma affects all of us, no matter what our nationality or religion.

Mr Said addresses the heart of the matter when he reminds us of our responsibility to right the tragic injustices done to the Palestinian people in Israel, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. No one is free of guilt; at most, we have only offered rhetoric rather than insisting on solutions from our leaders.

Most of us are secure, we have a roof over our heads, food on our tables and education for our children. We have not felt the desperation of the daily struggle for these 'rights', nor the feeling of hopelessness when there is no one to whom to turn.

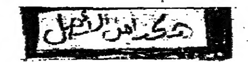
As the world reminds us never to forget the outrages of the Holocaust, why then has the world not remembered its responsibilities in the fifty years of the Palestinian diaspora?

Lesley Lababidi
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All readers' contributions and comments should be addressed to The Editor. E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg; Fax: +202 578 6089



Boutros Boutros-Ghali was back in Cairo this week, in his new capacity as secretary-general of Francophonie. Ever the optimist, he shows his sparkling teeth when he smiles, transforming an otherwise rather austere face with a ray of pure wit. His slightly prominent eyes express the humorous sagacity of a benevolent professor. I drew him looking over his shoulder, a pose which brings his sharp jawbone and bony neck into sharp relief.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

The other terrorism

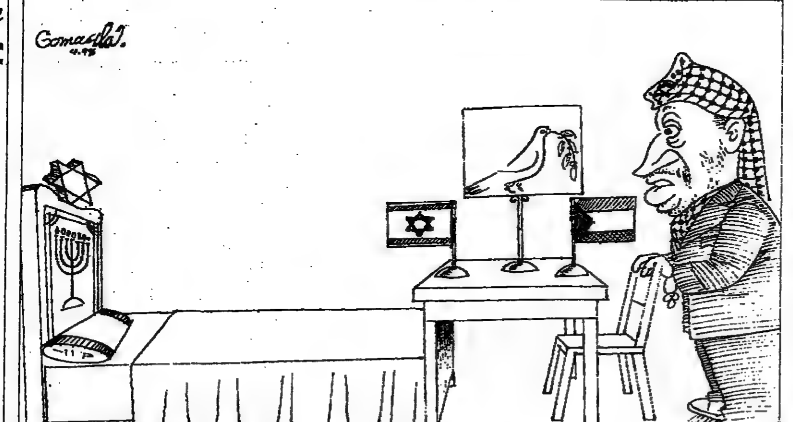
After years of disputes, debates and meetings, Arab countries have finally signed an agreement to combat terrorism, which consolidates inter-dependence in the field of security. The signatory countries agreed to create security and judicial mechanisms to foster collective efforts for eradicating terrorism from the region.

Most importantly, the agreement has succeeded in reaching a consensus on the definition of terrorism, one which clearly distinguishes between terrorism and nationalist movements fighting to free their land from occupation. The agreement has also introduced an information exchange system on terrorism and terrorists and called for cooperation in pursuing, arresting and trying terrorists, thereby refuting the allegations favoured by certain Westerners that Arabs are terrorists by nature and that Islam may be equated with terrorism. The agreement has also eliminated many of the contradictions in Arab stances that surface whenever an Arab country demands the extradition of a terrorist from a European country, while remaining unable to make the same demand from another Arab country.

Evidently, the significance of this agreement depends solely on its rigorous implementation and genuine adherence to its prescriptions. It can be an effective means for eliminating many disputes that arise between Arab countries on charges that one country is playing host to elements that are potential or actual threats to peace and order in another. The charges are substantiated by bitter experience: terrorists have set up bases in one Arab country, crossing into another to commit crimes, with or without the assistance or knowledge of the host government. Genuine adherence to and implementation of the agreement are necessary because of we have a record of highly praised agreements which boil down to little more than ink on paper, with no concrete effect in settling disputes or limiting damage when terrorism strikes.

There is reason to hope, today, that terrorism can be contained. Forms of terrorism are raging today which Arab governments and regimes have as yet failed to address. It may be time to address such forms of terrorism in a bid to save the Arabs from reaching first place on the list of countries where states practice terrorism against their own citizens.

Indications abound that torture, the abduction of political opponents and forced "disappearance" are not things of the past. There are still cases of inhuman treatment of prisoners and political offenders, and abuse of the emergency laws. Scores of massacres and assaults on citizens are never adequately investigated. The freedom of the press and journalists is still limited. Horrific human rights violations fill the pages of reports by international organisations. Instead of refuting the accusations by clearing matters, the Arabs merely deny that such incidents ever take place. International reports on Iraq, Algeria and Sudan and the incidents published timidly by the Arab press, all deal with lawlessness, violence and fanaticism which destabilise countries and impede their progress towards peace and freedom. The agreement cannot achieve its objectives unless it succeeds in addressing the "other kind" of terrorism.



Soapbox

Sinai's strategy

The decision to go to war in October 1973 reflected the firm conviction that war was the only way to create a new strategic status quo which could open new channels for peace and create opportunities to recover Arab land.

The Egyptian strategy — decisive military action followed by effective political manoeuvres — altered the courses of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Sinai was liberated, and all the occupied territories would have followed suit had the Egyptian strategy been endorsed by all the Arabs.

The Egyptian leadership was aware of the strategic balance prevailing at the time. It was clear that all the occupied territories would not be liberated by military action alone. Such ideas were unrealistic and politically immature. The military phase was envisaged only to reverse the defeat of 1967 and to emerge from the political crisis to wider horizons of peace founded on justice .

Although Egypt recovered all its territory, it never reneged on its Arab duties. Egypt tried to place the Palestinian cause at the beginning of a path to peace by drawing up a self-rule agreement within the framework of the Camp David Accord. The Palestinian leaders rejected the opportunity. The Arabs only accepted a settlement in 1991. But the international scene was no longer the same. The momentum created by the October war had considerably slowed down, and Israel had been given an invaluable opportunity to tighten its grip on the territory. Only a renewal of Arab solidarity can reverse this situation.

It has been 16 years since Sinai's liberation and today, once again, we need to take a collective stand.

This week's Soapbox speaker is Al-Ahram's *adviser on Strategic Affairs.*

Taha El-Magdoub

Falling through the cracks

Ideological power struggles in Iran have claimed a new victim. **Eqbal Ahmad** looks into the rift

On 15 April, Gholam Hussein Karbaschi, Teheran's 44-year-old mayor, was released after 11 days in prison by the order of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the 'supremeguide' who wields the ultimate judicial and executive powers in Iran. The release order came following a violent confrontation by supporters and opponents of the mayor, after President Mohamed Khatami pleaded with the *Faqih* and former president Hashemi Rafsanjani backed his successor's plea.

Iran's Islamic reformists have thus won an early battle in what is most likely a long-drawn ideological struggle over the future of the Iranian state and society. Even this limited victory is by no means decisive. Mr Karbaschi remains under indictment. His prosecution shall proceed, as the *Faqih*'s order underlined, "with precision". The court's antipathy to him is widely known. If he is condemned, his supporters, among whom are a majority of President Khatami's cabinet, will continue to battle their opponents, who are well entrenched in the power structure as they control nearly all the levers of power — the judiciary, police and armed forces; nationalised industries, radio and television, and the influential foundations which hold the purse strings of Iran's welfare system. Above all, they enjoy the sympathies of Ayatollah Khamenei and, in a crunch, are likely to have the support of the Supreme Guide.

Against this formidable array of opponents, the reformists' assets are elements of the bureaucracy, Iran's enfeebled intelligentsia, the twenty million voters who brought President Khatami into office, and an activated student community. Their effectiveness will depend on the extent of their political mobilisation at critical junctures, a human factor impossible at this point to predict. Additionally, the reformists should be aided by Hujjat-ul-Islam Hashemi Rafsanjani, who chairs the Expediency Council, an advisory body to the *Velayet-i-Faqih*, an ideal stage for the former president to exert his moderating influence in a complex struggle of high stakes and shrewd protagonists.

The issues behind the contestations are the same as those that surfaced soon after the Islamists' seizure of power: who shall govern Iran, how, and in accordance with what perspectives on Islam? Mehdi Bazargan and Karim Sanjabi, Mohamed Yazdi and Sadegh Qotubzadeh, Abul-Hassan Bani Sadr and the Mujahidin-i-Islam, Ayatollah Beheshti, and Ayatollah Taleghani were all, in their differing ways, protagonists in this battle over the shape of Islamic polity. Those unresolved questions have re-surfaced now in a new guise.

The worst way to watch its progress is to read the Western media uncritically, as it is simultaneously well-informed, profoundly ignorant, and blinded by analytical categories such as 'conservatives, liberals and leftists'. Familiar, therefore comforting, such classifications do not clarify much about Iranian and Islamic ideological disputes. The so-called 'conservatives', for example, are die-hard anti-Americans, while the 'leftists' favour restoration of normal relations with the West, and the 'liberals' are split on nearly every important issue. Contrary to classical conservative precept, Iran's so-called conservatives are committed 'statists'. They are endowed with the attributes associated with Soviet-style socialism and Third World radicals. They oppose market oriented re-structuring of the economy and privatisation of Iran's nationalised industry, wish to hold on to the nationalised foundations as welfare fiefdoms, and favour centralised power as well as state control over culture, education, the press and other publications. They are conservative only in the limited, literal sense of wanting to conserve Iran's post-revolutionary status quo of power and privilege, of which they are the primary beneficiaries.

The 'leftists', on the other hand, are hardly that. They favour a liberal economy with an increasing role for private enterprise, freedoms of speech and association, greater participation of women in public life, and a lively civil society gaining hegemony over the state. In the context of the Iranian revolution, their outlook is congruent with those of Ali Shariati, Ayatollah Taleghani, and Mehdi Bazargan, which is to say that Islam remains the defining factor in their politics as a source of preamble and principle of legitimation. But their perspective on Islam is modernist, influenced by the thoughts of the *ulema* and nationalist intellectuals of the Constitutional Movement, which yielded Iran's first constitution in 1905, and by such Muslim reformers as Sayed Ahmed Khan, Rashid Rida, Mohamed Iqbal and, more contemporaneously, Ali Shariati and Mehdi Bazargan.

Not accidentally, the first confrontation of this recent period occurred at Bazargan's death anniversary. Khatami's government permitted it to be commemorated publicly. Ibrahim Yazdi, a former aide to Ayatollah Khomeini and Iran's foreign minister in the government headed by Bazargan, led the event as leader of Bazargan's Iran Freedom Party. An unexpectedly large audience turned up at the memorial service, which became an occasion for invoking modernist Islamic perspectives on citizens' rights, ecumenism, democracy and cultural freedom. Opponents criticised the government for allowing such an event to take place. Some weeks later, in mid-December, Yazdi was hauled into Tehran's Evin prison, from where he was released after a chorus of protests in Iran and outside. The immediate cause of his arrest was a collective letter he signed with fifty other persons, including some prominent clerics, to demand that the rights of Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri be respected. Montazeri's situation reveals yet another irony of the nexus between religion and state in Iran.

The Grand Ayatollah is a greatly revered figure as a religious scholar and persistent opponent of the Pahlevi regime. He was Ayatollah Khomeini's most cherished student, colleague, and political collaborator. When Khomeini was imprisoned following the June 1963 uprising, it was Montazeri who led the campaign for his release. In 1965, when Khomeini was exiled to Turkey, Montazeri remained in Iran and was promptly imprisoned. Thereafter he became a mainstay of the *ulema*'s opposition to the Shah, and served several stints in the Shah's prisons, where he was subjected to harsh treatment. In post-Shah Iran, he became Ayatollah Khomeini's designated successor, a designation confirmed in November 1984 by the Council of Experts. In 1987 began the series of internal intrigues which included allegations of his association with "liberal circles", a reference to Bazargan and other modernists. The infighting finally led to his resignation in March 1989. A mere three months later Ayatollah Khomeini passed away and a relatively junior cleric, Hujjat-ul-Islam Ali Khamenei, succeeded him as the *Faqih* although he had not then attained the rank of Ayatollah, and was nowhere near being regarded as *marja-i-taqlid*. In the Shi'a tradition, the *marja* is an acknowledged theological scholar whose opinion carries decisive weight.

As the author of an authoritative two-volume work on *Velayet-i-Faqih*, Ayatollah Montazeri is the most respected living authority on the subject. As the president of the Assembly of Experts, which drafted the Constitution of the Islamic Republic, he also guided its investiture as Iran's unique constitutional innovation — rule by a jurisconsult — which has its origins in Shi'a theology and also, via Al-Farabi, in Plato's philosopher-king. Ayatollah Beheshti, who was killed in June 1981 by a bomb planted by the Mujahidin-i-Islam, drafted Article 5, which laid down that, during the occultation (of the Hidden Imam) "the governance and leadership [of the state] devolve upon the just and pious *faqih* who is acquainted with circumstances of his age; courageous, resourceful and possessed of administrative ability; and recognised and accepted as leader by the majority of the people." The constitution explicitly provided that the *faqih* must be a *marja*. This latter provision was repealed in 1989 to make it possible for Ali Khamenei to succeed Ayatollah Khomeini.

Since then, the extraordinary powers of the *faqih* have been a subject of whispered controversy in Iran. Ayatollah Khamenei has from the start tended to argue that the *faqih*'s authority cannot be questioned or subjected to checks and balances. "One who acts on God's behalf is not a dictator," he argued during the constitutional debate in 1986. Last November, Ayatollah Montazeri brought the matter back into the open, causing a political earthquake. From Qom he spoke out on the primacy of the *faqih*'s role as spiritual guide, *mujtahid*, and arbiter, implying that it was not for him to control such institutions as the police, security departments, and armed forces. There was immediate reaction: a mob attacked his home in Qom, and restrictions were imposed on the Grand Ayatollah's movement and activities as teacher and scholar. Public protests followed. Even the clerics of Iran became divided over the issue. Thus Ayatollah Hussein Ali Montazeri exposed to full view the cracks in Iran's ideological consensus, which leaders like Hashemi Rafsanjani and Mohamed Khatami had been trying hard to keep under the carpet.

Gholam Hussein Karbaschi is the first person, but by no means the last, to have fallen between the cracks. The dynamic, no-nonsense mayor of Teheran was an obvious target. An *'alim* by training, he attained the rank of *Hujjat-ul-Islam* before electing to be a layman. He is flamboyant, outspoken, runs afoul of vested interests, and gets things done. He first attracted attention as the mayor who restored war-decayed Isfahan to its erstwhile glory. Rafsanjani appointed him mayor of Teheran. Minus the daily violence, Teheran was more impossible to restore to health than Karabachi or Casablanca. He has helped transform it into a modern metropolis, with cultural centres in major neighborhoods, community centres in poor areas, parks, playgrounds, art galleries, and pollution control. The slaughterhouse that filled half a million homes with foul smell is now a community centre where the city's poor people have easy access to all kinds of amenities. On the graffiti-covered city walls now hang colorful posters. A city-sponsored newspaper, *Hamshehri*, is among the most widely read in Iran.

Karbaschi taxed the rich to rebuild the city. Developers, political land grabbers, and patronage distributors disliked him. The entrenched clerical elite distrusted his modern style of governance and his contemporary preferences. He campaigned vigorously for Mohamed Khatami and became identified as an advance man of his reformist agenda. The die was then cast for Gholam Hussein Karbaschi.

Who are 'we, the people'?

If the Security Council continues to ignore the voices of the peoples who created it, its mandate must be rendered null and void. **Suhair Sukkari** sees the embargo on Iraq as a case in point

The world today has a new despotic ruler, busy doing away with all vestiges of democratic governance at the international level. We have had ample warning: the Security Council of the United Nations controls the destinies of all peoples, although these peoples brought it into existence in the first place.

The first words of the United Nations Charter are "We, the peoples of the United Nations". How, then, have "we, the peoples" allowed the Security Council to ignore us? How have we allowed matters to deteriorate so badly that a minority of governments can control the decisions of the United Nations and its Security Council — although the Charter does not begin with words like "we, the governments of the United Nations"? Isn't there something basically wrong here that calls for all peoples of the United Nations to pause and think matters over so as to find ways to put an end to this disaster?

On 27 April 1998, the Security Council began its session to review the sanctions on Iraq. Unfortunately, we have every reason to believe that the Council, as it has always done since the imposition of the embargo, will pass a resolution providing for the continuation of these sanctions on the basis of the same old flimsy pretexts. Richard Butler, head of UNSCOM, has failed to find so much as the smell of a biological, chemical or any other weapon in the presidential sites, let alone a weapon capable of destroying Tel Aviv (or the whole world) fifty times over; but he is already there, right on cue, with a report in which he reports no progress in disarming Iraq over the last six months — not because he has material evidence that there are arsenals whose existence Iraq denies, but because Iraq has not supplied him with satisfactory documentation indicating how and when it destroyed this or that quantity of biological or chemical materials and/or warheads — which he suspects, based on conjectures alone, Iraq possessed at some point in time.

On the other hand, when the director-general of the International Atomic Energy Agency dared to issue a report stating that Iraq has complied with all relevant Security Council resolutions and no longer possesses any nuclear capability, the report was immediately attacked and its validity impugned. The integrity and impartiality of those who prepared it is questioned and they were accused of being "dupes" who had fallen prey to Iraqi deception.

It is now quite clear to anyone with eyes to see with that the target is not governments and regimes but peoples, particularly peoples of what used to be called the Third World, and most particularly Arab and Islamic peoples. Iraq's case happens to be only the "opening shot" in the process of implementing a much larger plan that will be developed and refined in light of the experience acquired in Iraq. The plan is to nip in the bud any attempt at true progress on the part of these peoples, thus depriving them of self-confidence, turning them into a frustrated lot who have lost all hope, weakening them physically and mentally so that they are never able to stand on their own two feet and forever remain consumers rather than producers, ignorant rather than informed, imitators rather than creators.

That is the dark side of the picture. There is, however, a brighter side: history proves that destroying peoples is not an easy task, whatever the strength and power of their oppressors. On the other hand, although a people must fight for its own salvation, other people who share the same plight, and even large sectors of the population of the countries that oppress them, can lend a hand.

If we look around us and try to listen to the voices of such peoples, we find that here in Egypt alone, 18 million citizens have signed the Cairo Declaration, in which they demanded that the sanctions imposed on the Iraqi people be lifted and that economic embargoes should be considered weapons of mass destruction: their signatures were delivered to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan during his visit to Egypt, together with a letter calling upon him to communicate these demands to the Security Council in time for its 27 April session.

There have been other meetings, gatherings and demonstrations with similar demands in Jordan, Morocco, Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, France, Russia, the United States — even Kuwait.

The American government chose a small town in Ohio in the conviction that its conservative population with their simple, unaffected patriotism would give the government unquestioning support against any "external enemies": there, Albright, Cohen and Berger explained the administration's justifications for the military preparations then underway against Iraq. To the utter surprise of the big shots, these "safe" citizens launched such fierce attacks against them, their policies and actions as to put them completely off balance and ruin all they hoped to gain from the meeting. As a matter of fact, the meeting served only to provide further proof that the American policy on Iraq has nothing to do with the views of the American people, and everything to do with the aims of the well-known clique that controls American Middle Eastern policy in the Clinton administration.

Yet a minority of governments, driven by a handful of vested interests, continue to control the destinies of the peoples of the world with all the arrogance, superciliousness and cruelty they can muster, and they do this through our own creation: the Security Council of the United Nations.

On 27 April 1998, the United Nations came to a crossroads where it would have to take the way leading to reform, or the way leading to its inevitable demise. The peoples of the world have already had their say in the matter of the embargo on Iraq: they have unanimously called for lifting it. Furthermore, in the context of his determined efforts to reach agreement with Iraq, Kofi Annan has stated: "If I can't get the support of governments, then I'll get the support of the people. People move governments" (*New York Times*, 8 March), a statement so apt, so forceful and so true that it went a long way in regaining for the United Nations what it had lost in terms of the respect, dignity and status conferred on it by the peoples of the world.

The Security Council must remember that its mandate under the Charter comes from the peoples of the world, and that it is duty-bound to listen to their voices.

Should the Council do so, and decide to lift the embargo in compliance with the will of the peoples, well and good; if, however, it should flout the will of the peoples and decide to continue the embargo, then it would be necessary to proceed towards reform. Reform cannot be achieved without going back to the beginning, so that people may regain the initiative taken away from them by governments. If the Council takes a decision so contrary to popular will, it will be time for us, the people, to say no and to declare, as we did in 1945, that, we are "determined to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which... has brought untold sorrow to mankind", and that we are equally determined to adopt new measures that will compel the Council to comply with our demands with regard to saving future generations — that is, preventing the death of innocent children and the destruction of defenceless peoples.

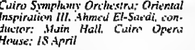
Reform can start by referring any decision by the Security Council to continue the embargo to an international plebiscite under the supervision of a body that reports directly to the General Assembly of the United Nations, which is more representative of the peoples of the world, with a view to proving that the Security Council no longer represents us and should therefore be abolished.

The peoples of the world can always devise another, more effective and more just tool to maintain international peace and security, stand guard over both the strong and the weak, and save future generations.

The writer is the coordinator of the Million Signature Campaign to Save the Children of Iraq and Ban Economic Blockades as Weapons of Mass Destruction.



Flying fiddles



David Blake dances in 2/4 moth time

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Oriental Inspiration III, Ahmed El-Saedi, conductor; Main Hall, Cairo Opera House; 18 April

Another "in the face" Cairo concert night. They come along almost uninvited, without publicity, unexpected. What will it be and who will do it? The whole thing may be cancelled. And the audience, will there be one?

There was for this concert. Certainly, not a seethe, but respectable and wide awake to potentials. Keep it clean boy: thus spake the late great Jelly Roll Morton in the seminal days of jazz. Being lean is a great way to survive almost anything musical, particularly if it has to do with a band. It keeps to the line, scale and narrative. Surface looks after itself. The conductor of this concert was again the protean Ahmed El-Saedi. He had done a slim-line Mahler 6th a few weeks ago. And, now, with Debussy's *Nocturnes* and Richard Strauss's *Also Spake Zarathustra*, he did it again — and it paid off again in a smashingly exciting wind up.

Who would expect such clarity and aesthetic facial surgery on these two ancient personages? El-Saedi knows how to bring it off. *Nocturnes* whizzed along just like 1930s jazz and *Zarathustra*, now over a century old, crashed into the opera house like a nuclear missile explosion and went berserk.

For Debussy's *Nocturnes* we were spared any delicate gouache washes of colour, 1900 being the date of the work. Instead, we had Delacroix, positive colouring and a high romantic view of Nuages, Fêtes and Sirène. It was Debussy at Carthage before its destruction. A very exciting time bend.

What happened to *Zarathustra*? Being over a century old, he is a dinosaur of quality, the lustre of whose jewels is real. This strange, horrid work still has the sheer bravado to knock you over. It does not age. It just ignores everything, moves out into a new era, indifferent to any criticisms — and charms everyone to death. Death for sure, since it is all about survival which is the same thing.

The concert was lean — and late. It is now 1998. This *Zarathustra* was 1896. The classic age was about over, and so Strauss brought opulence. Listeners really cannot do without opulence for long. The eager listening ear needs stretches of richness. And nothing better than Strauss to provide it. *Zarathustra* is autobiographical, symbolical, elephantiasis, Persian — and Zoroastrian, quite a legitimate belief, but Richard Strauss turned it into Luciferism

The sci-fi times took up the opening explosion of the chords for the beginning of Kubrick's *2001*. *Zarathustra* entered pop land, but it is now back where it belongs as the most enormous symphonic poem of all. It is not as awful as it sounds. In fact, the domestic-erotic part of it is very beauteously done, what was later to come in the Strauss operas. Who is to mop up the overflow from the Strauss orchestra? No one so far. It grew too large even for him to handle, split into pieces and became the new music of Vienna.

El-Saedi knows his way with such music. He flies high, looks down upon it and segments it into lucid, small, exact pieces, all held together by the central themes from which it had grown. So, though the timbers of the opera house shivered under the impact of the mighty noise, instead of being blowsy and overblown, it became a brilliantly lit sight of a musical landscape that may soon disappear forever.

Richard Strauss came, stayed a while and left us. Like an anaconda, he swallowed western music alive.

The Egyptian Chamber Orchestra; Iman Mustafa, soprano, Wael Farouk, piano and Olga Shourkhouetsa, harp; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 20 April

Music does not defeat time. It stretches it. The two final concerts of this review demonstrate how far the stretch has gone. Musically, they left the human landscape and flew far away into an inhuman one of insects and spacescapes in which only the moon, a reflection, is the light that shines.

The Pro Helvetia-Egyptian musical handshake showed the distance covered. It was a lively showing of four composers whose work is the result of study both here and abroad, but arriving more or less at the same destination, brothers under the skin looking out at a scene which haunts them and which leaves them little room to strike individual images.

Uzor has been played here before, and his music fits a formula which is common to most Egyptian composers, whether they have studied at home or abroad. Uzor is Nigerian, but international in his career movements. His long soprano piece called *Canto 1 for soprano and ensemble* makes a fine, intense listen. He does what so many younger composers do these days when dealing with the human voice, allowing a sense of sheer drama to enter the vocal line by way of enormous intervals with which the singer must cope. Iman Mustafa, rather like the tenor who faced the horrendous intervals of Uzor's *Akhenaton* music, made a success of the piece, but such music never allows the voice to flow freely. The going becomes hard and rather heartless.

We were also offered Ahmed Madkour's *The King's Valley* — grandiose and spacious with dark tones. His music flows and has a kind of root security the other music of this evening lacks. He is from Aswan and maybe his study with Mona Ghoneim encouraged a sense of presence which sounds in her own music beyond most other Egyptian composers.

Piano pieces by Amr Okba, Egyptian and locally trained, were played by Wael Farouk with understanding. Farouk has an artist's technique, strong but tuned into the music at hand, and Okba's sounded exciting, adventurous and outward looking.

Finally, Frank Martin's *String trio* with the Egyptian Chamber Orchestra. Martin has a place in Egyptian concert life. He attracts institutions and satisfies a public. A mystery because though his fame is international, it is difficult music and his position is unique, though not widely recognised. So much the better for Cairo's concert life. This piece rocks back and forth like an old armchair. It spins the movements like a loom of life, sometimes bright, then dark, but always with a question mark. The question is grey.

Cairo Opera Orchestra; Music for All V; Mohamed Hamdi, clarinet, Manal Mohie El-Din, harp and Mamdouh El-Gebaly, lute; Ivan Filev, conductor; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 24 April

Music for All is more an event if played in the Main Hall of the opera than in the Small. And there were fewer children than at the other concerts. The concerts are not necessarily for children, but their presence helps the matinée atmosphere to be more like a musical party. What would they have thought of this concert? It had great interest, had a pattern and a sound, set the images flying in space — and it also had three terrific soloists and an imaginative conductor. It therefore had about everything and was enjoyable, but also slightly sharp and disturbing.

Music for All suggests something populist which this concert was not. Had the children come, they would have been subjected to a mixed bag of rather elitist contemporary music given by three players, all of whose coordination skills produced an electric atmosphere and one of menace.

If the sounds in this concert can be taken as typical, then Egypt has a musical sound uniquely its own. Slightly further centre than Steve Reich or Brian Ferneybough, it has minimalist and constructionalist tendencies which give it a definitely spooky rather than humanist impact on the listener.

The concert was divided into two parts. First came Khaled Shoukry with something called *The Tomb*, two movements for chamber orchestra. Then *The Cavaliers*, a suite in five movements, about points, lines and finding yourself. Then the *Sonata 2 for string orchestra*. All these titles brought forth music situated in the same place. Where that place is is uncertain.

The Cavaliers had a noble tune, buzzing shapes full of *glissandi* and disintegrated silences when chirps from night insects chatted with each other. All Shoukry's sounds were closely related. Insects, millions of them billow past the listener in clouds. Space, vast space is suggested, and maybe it is not Egypt at all.

Part two of the evening was devoted to compositions by Sherif Mohie El-Din. Different composer, same landscape. The *Concerto for oud* introduced none less than one of Umm Kulthum's best musicians, Mamdouh El-Gebaly. His playing was virtuoso and added some variety to what had preceded it.

The piece of the evening was called *Tahmil*. And so came Manal Mohie El-Din to play the harp part. She was completely breath-taking — as was Mohamed Hamdi on the clarinet. This was the first performance of the work, sounding as if it was launched on a successful career. Every device for the orchestra and soloists was shown and played with great intensity. The piece is dramatic as drum sounds, footsteps in the dark. In fact it is the same crepuscular music we had heard all night. Before or after the flood, but without Noah. No humans, just notes or moths who may be notes. Nothing for sure.

Time, the oldest enemy, has ceased to palpitate. This music is wind lanes and time lines around the great pyramid. A year is a lot of time in the life of a moth, but brief in Mohie El-Din's sounds. Never look into the gloaming for any truths. They can be heard, now, at the end of things, but never seen.

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

Fathy Afifi (Paintings)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12 noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 30 May.

Hamid Abdullah
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 21 May.
Selected works 1953-'83.

Robert Kappa (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. From 4 May until June.
36 photographs by one of the century's most celebrated photojournalists.

Adli Rizkallah (Watercolours)
Espace Gallery, 1, Al-Sherefein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thu 10am-2 pm & 6-9 pm. Until 6 May.

Vivi Sylven
Extra Gallery, Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. From 5-23 May.

Salah Zaki (Paintings in progress)
Mubarak Public Library, 4, El-Tahawia St, off El-Nil St, Giza. Tel: 336 0291. Daily exc Tues, 11 am-7pm. Until 14 May.

Student Art Exhibition
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. From 6-24 May.

David d'Agostino & Nazli Madkour
Akhenaton Gallery, Centre of Arts, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1.30pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 10 May.
Installation with rope, nails, cloth and wall paintings from the former, 30 mixed media works exhibited under the collective title Palimpsest from the latter.

Abdel-Aal
Doroub Gallery, 4 Latin America St, Garden City. Tel 354 7951. Opening Until 12 May.
Paintings under the title Girls from Egypt.

Ali Ezouik (Watercolours)
Museum of Modern Egyptian Art, Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm. Until 13 May.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

FILMS

Rainer Weiner Fassbinder mini season Interviews
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. Tel 575 9877
5 May, 7 pm: First screening in Egypt of Florian Hopf's interviews with Fassbinder, followed by a screening of Lili Marlene (1980)
6 May, 7 pm: Despair (1977)

French Films
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madraset Al-Hoqouq Al-Ferensiya St, Mounira. Tel 354 7679. With Arabic and English subtitles.
30 April, 4pm & 8pm: **Pourvu que ça dure**, dir michel Thibaud
3 May, 4pm & 8pm: **Grosse fatigue**, dir Michel Blanc
4 May, 4pm & 8pm: **L'appât**, dir Bertrand Tavernier
5 May, 4pm & 8pm. **Les victimes**, dir Patrick Grandperret

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Dantella (Lace)
Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm.

Mr Bean
Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Fools Rush In
Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Copland
Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm

Titanic
MGM Kolleyet Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm. Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.



Hamed Abdullah

Contact
Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

El-Batal (The Hero)
Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Mogrem Maa Martabet El-Sharaf (A Criminal with High Honours)
Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

DANCE

Osiris
Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 1 May, 9pm
The Egyptian Ballet troupe appear in Gamal Abdel-Rahim's composition, choreographed by Ermenia Kamel. Opera Orchestra conducted by Sherif Mohieddin.

MUSIC

Gamal Abdel-Rahim
Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 1 May, 9pm
Introduction and Rondo Baladi by Gamal Abdel-Rahim, with the Opera Orchestra and Choir, conducted by Youssef El-Sisi, followed by a dance performance, see above.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 2 May 9 pm.
Schumann, Concerto for Piano and Orchestra and Shostakovitch, Symphony No 8, conducted by Ahmed El-Saedi.

THEATRE

Al-'Arid (The Model)
Puppet Theatre, Ataba Sq. Tel 5910954. Daily, 9pm

Khat Ahmar (Red Line)
Al-Tali'a, Ataba Sq. Tel 5937 948. Daily, 10pm

Shakespeare, One-Two
Al-Tali'a, Ataba Sq. Tel 5937 948. Daily, 7pm

Hubb Ma Qabl Al-Rahil (Love Before Departure)
National, Ataba Sq. Tel 591 1267/7783. Daily, 8.30pm

LECTURES

The Gardens of the Great Moghuls: Development and Meaning
Room 203, Rare Books Library, AUC, Corner of Sheikh Rihan and Mansour streets. 3 May, 5pm
Lecture by Ebba Koch, professor of Islamic art at the University of Vienna.

Egypt Exploration Society Survey of Gabal El-Haridi
British Council Auditorium, 192 Sharia El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 3018391. 5 May, 7pm
Lecture by Chris Kirby, Kings College, London.

7TH CAVAFY INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

1 May, 8pm: Small Hall, Cairo Opera House
Inaugural address, poetry recitation by Rifaat Al-Salaam, Wahid Al-Tawila, Rubina Yannakopoulou and Poppi Moskof
2 May, 6pm: Hellenic Foundation of Culture, 18 Sidi El-Metwalli St, Attarine, Alexandria.
Time and Place in Cavafy or Four and One Ways to Make Fun of the Poet, Y Andreadis; Greek Women in Naguib Mahfouz' *Miramar*, Azza Karara; For Love and Money: Eros, Art and the Market Place in Cavafy's Poetry, Peter Mac Ridge; Cavafy, Forerunner of the Multinational Ideal, M Pierris; The Ethics of Realism, John Rodenbeck; Modern Greek Culture and Cavafy, K Tsoukalas
3 May, 6pm: Venue as above
The New Anthology of Modern Greek Poetry in Arabic, Mohamed Hamdi Ibrahim; The common and the foreign in Cavafy's poetics of human knowledge, Dimitris Agelatos; The essays of Nicolas Clas on Cavafy, Pandelis Boudouris; Going towards the East, Kiriakos Haralambis; Cavafy and the discourse of the soul, F Tsalikoglou; Art as a medicament in Cavafy, Giorgos Veltsos; On some aspects of Cavafy's poetry, Lutfi Yahia
4 May, 10am: Venue as above
On Cavafy's epigons: Stratsis Tsirkas, Naim Attia; Stratsis Tsirkas seen by his Egyptian translator, Samuel Bichara; The political vision of Stratsis Tsirkas, Kostas Zouraris; On Stratsis Tsirkas, Chriss Prokopaki; Cavafy and Iran, Fereydoun Feryad.
4 May, 6pm: Venue as above
Recitation of the Cavafy Award winners for 1998.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.

Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by ***Injy El-Kashef***

Cinema

Ambition underplayed

Good intentions hardly suffice, writes **Khairiya El-Bishlawi** of *Al-Batal*

Magdi Ahmed Ali's second film, *Al-Batal* (The Hero), is an ambitious project. He seeks to recreate the ambiance of Alexandria from 1919 to the mid-20s through the network of relationships that links its various ethnic and political groups. He explores the links between Egyptians and Greeks, between either ethnic group and the British colonial powers, between the latter and the ruling aristocracy, and so on.

The back streets of Alexandria, and the plight of their inhabitants, provide the focal point of the action, dramatising the wide gap between such back streets and the smart villas occupied by those who plunder what is left of Egypt's wealth after the British have taken the cream. In the alleyways you meet *Umm* Houda (Magda El-Khatib) and *Abu* Hanifa (Hassan Hosni), whose physical disabilities allegorise their economic wretchedness.

Despite the fact that this film is set in the 1920s, it echoes the same preoccupations of Ali's directorial debut, *Ya Donia Ya Gharami*, set in the 1990s. Technically, however, the film has its merits. Tarek El-Telmissani's cinematography is sensitive in its evocation of the past. Salah Mar'ei's studied and well-executed sets enhance the film's technical merit.

As for the plot itself, it weaves around three main characters, each representing one aspect of the general idea the director wants to communicate. Houda Kalawi (Ahmed Zaki), Hassan (Mohamed Heneidi) and Petro (Mustafa Amar) are three friends who symbolise facets of the Alexandria of the 1920s.

The changes in each of the three friends mirror the changes in the city itself. Houda replaces his father, after his death, in the same carpentry workshop owned by an old Greek. He supports both his mother and sister Fatma who falls in love with his friend and wants to marry him. Hassan is the son of a poor artisan. The third friend, Petro, is the offspring of a mixed Egyptian-Greek marriage. Hassan and Petro, who have no specific job, are fond of singing and one of them loves a female singer of foreign extraction. In short, the three friends' existence verges on the vagabond, occasionally veering in the direction of small-time conmen.

Wandering on the Corniche, they describe themselves as the fish, and Alexandria the sea. Their pleasures consist literally — as they themselves put it — in picking up women. And indeed there are plenty of scenes involving their womanising: there is Petro with his singer-lover in the bedroom; there is Hassan bringing a fat prostitute to a cabin on the beach for the use of the three friends; there is the young wife of the Greek carpenter for whom Houda works.

It would have been better for both the director and the script-writer to do away with these unnecessary scenes which simply divert the viewers' attention from the main theme of the film and make it look like yet another vulgar, commercial film.

The main theme is the three friends' emulation of a hero (in Arabic, *batal*, as in the title): Saad Zaghloul, the leader of the 1919 Revolution. Houda writes letters to the exiled Saad Zaghloul and dreams of him day and night. Houda also wants to be a hero, though in a different field — he is a boxer who aspires to become a champion, something which he eventually achieves. His new-found success allows him to enter into a relationship with a young woman from an aristocratic family, though he soon discovers that the gap separating their worlds is unbridgeable. He then turns for solace to a neighbour who has always loved him.

As for Hassan, a meeting with an anti-British activist turns his life upside down and, turning into an activist himself, he is mortally wounded by a British bullet fired on demonstrators shortly after he had married Houda's sister, who is now pregnant. The longing of both men for a cause to link their lives with and their dreams of a brighter future are given voice in the songs sung by their third friend, Petro, which help enhance and give colour to their quest. However, this grand theme falls flat through a poor and fragmented script which seems to be divided between two aims: satisfying the box-office and saying something of significance.

If the main characters remain unconvincing, minor characters are more rounded and real. *Abu* Hanifa, masterfully played by Hassan Hosni, the blind man who can distinguish gold from copper by its sound, is possibly the most memorable character in the film. Magda El-Khatib, in the role of Houda's mother, likewise puts in a skillful performance, salvaging a role that would otherwise have been redundant.

The gap between what the director intended and what he does say in the final product is very wide. It would seem that his intention was to show a transformation from the aimless *dolce vita* of wining and womanising into a meaningful life with a cause: that of a people struggling for their independence in the context of the 1919 Revolution. Unfortunately though, the national cause is reduced here to sloganeering and the whole thing feels fabricated.

Around the galleries



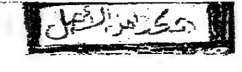
Ashraf El-Zimzami

SPARE parts of automobiles and machine parts are the building materials of well executed sculptures by **Mahmoud Meneis** on show at the **Centre of Arts**, Zamalek.

Madar Gallery, Mohandessin, hosts paintings by **Ashraf El-Zimzami**. These are mostly of interiors and are influenced by the work of El-Gazzar and, before him, the Fauvists.

Paintings by **Mohamed El-Kholy** are on exhibit at **Horus Gallery** in the Faculty of Art Education. These make use of repeated natural motifs, which are combined in simple, but strong compositions, producing an overall effect of textiles.

Reviewed by ***Nagwa El-Ashri***



هكذا من الأصل

Not so secret gardens

The Dream Palace of the Arabs: A Generation's Odyssey, Fouad Ajami, New York: Pantheon Books, 1998

Fouad Ajami's new book is a series of essays on Arab intellectuals and politics, a topic he had tackled in an earlier book, namely *The Arab Predicament*. Unlike the previous book, in which Ajami advanced the conclusion that Arab nationalism had been defeated and is now dead, this book offers no new conclusions or analyses. The same intellectuals (except for Ajami's recent discovery of the Lebanese poet Khalil Hawi and a few others) and politicians as well as the same political issues are revisited, only this time they are updated to include the aftermath of Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon (but not the invasion itself), the second Gulf War, and the recent peace agreements between Israel and the PLO, and between Israel and the Jordanian government.

Continuing the pseudo-psychological profile of the Arabs and their culture, which he had introduced 17 years ago in *The Arab Predicament* (a method later employed by one of Ajami's junior ideological lieutenants, Kanan Makiyyah), Ajami diagnoses Arabs as suffering from symptoms that can only be described as collective psychosis. Arabs, unlike other ethnic/national groups, do not seem to have goals, plans, objectives or a sense of purpose. According to Ajami, Arabs suffer from "delirium" (p 132) and "supreme delusion" (p 80). They entertain unrealistic "extravagant hopes" and "dreams" of unattainable palaces (p 130). They also hold "bold and fanciful ideas" (p 130). Arab culture is "susceptible to legend" (p 178), and Arab nationalism is a "mirage" (p 246) with its history being nothing but "tragedy" and "farce" (p 246). Given these symptoms, Arabs therefore seem to suffer collectively along with their culture of a psychosis that can be diagnosed as a mixture of megalomania, melancholia and last but not least delusional schizophrenia. Based on Ajami's account, one would conclude that rationality has no place in the Arab collective psyche. As Ajami never tires of telling his television viewers when he appears on CBS television news, the "Arab hordes" are violent, irrational and cannot accept reality and will attack innocent America and Israel.

As in his earlier book, Ajami views the politico-intellectual history of the modern Arab World as extending from Arab nationalists to Islamists. Holders of these ideologies, be they the state or the opposition, have engulfed the Arab world in an "ocean of terror". More recently, such non-pragmatist and illiberal intellectuals have attacked the "peace" with Israel. Ajami, disgusted and horrified by these ideologies and their holders, including Egyptian nationalists and Islamists critical of the US, laments the "pleasant bourgeois age" in Egypt. It is this age of pashas, the loss of which he mourns, which receives the most sympathetic adjectives in his narrative. In describing the career of a pre-Nasserist royalist minister, Fouad Serageddin, Ajami waxes romantic. Those were "quaint and less crowded times...villas once grand but now shabby and covered with dust; homes with gardens where the great bourgeois families once lived, secure in their sense of place and order". Imagining that age conjures up for Ajami a "scent of old Egypt, the Egypt of the grand tour, the country celebrated by Lawrence Durrell in his *Alexandria Quartet*". Today, however, this "crowded land has gone beyond that pleasant bourgeois age and its houses with gardens".

Arab liberal-pragmatist intellectuals who adore the United States and "free-markets" and who now punctuate the Arab academic, journalistic and bureaucratic landscapes from Morocco to the Gulf can hardly be found in Ajami's text. On the few occasions when they do appear, it is as derided and ridiculed lonely voices. In the context of discussing the PLO and the Jordanian regime's "peace" agreements with Israel, Ajami tells us:

"In an Arab political history littered with thwarted dreams, little honor would be extended to pragmatists who knew the limits of what could and could not be done. The political culture of nationalism reserved its approval for those who led ruinous campaigns in pursuit of impossible quests. It was futile to expect a grand apology for [the late Jordanian king] Abdullah, some public warrant for what he did long ago. The tracts of nationalism will not be rewritten. The likes of Laith Shubaylat [the Jordanian dissident who is currently languishing in a Jordanian prison for the mortal sin of holding political views inimical to certain regime policies] will not be appeased. A foul wind, and a spirit that bordered on nihilism, greeted this peace [with Israel]. In the time of the Americans, the Arab intellectual world had become militantly illiberal (as though to compensate for the political hegemony of Pax Americana). In their opposition to the peace, writers and activists marked out an intellectual tradition beyond America's power and beyond America's judgment."

The fact that a large number of Arab intellectuals today praise the United States and defend the unpopular policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in the Arab world does not deter Ajami. From Arab academics who currently staff the many "research centres" in Egypt, much of North Africa, Jordan, Lebanon, the West Bank and Gaza (whose "research" and "researchers" are funded by US, German, and French foundations, not to mention the US Endowment for Democracy and other such "democracy"-promoting institutions), to the new brand of Arab Zionists whose pro-Israeli and pro-American views punctuate the pages of the Arab press from London to all Arab capitals, to the recently co-opted Palestinian intellectuals in the occupied and "liberated" territories to Arab émigrés of Ajami's calibre whose "liberal" views on the Arab world are the only Arab views allowed in the US mainstream media and government, intellectual liberal-pragmatists have become increasingly hegemonic in the Arab world today. As for the late king Abdullah, even his arch-critic at the time of his death, Abdallah Al-Tall, apologised to his grandson King Hussein when he returned to Jordan in 1966. Al-Tall was so enthusiastic about his new-found respect for King Abdullah that he chastised Nasser for his anti-Hashemite rhetoric and proposed "that King Abdullah be considered a nationalist hero." He proceeded to say that if "erecting statues in order to immortalise heroes was part of our religion and traditions, it would have been imperative that a statue of King Abdullah be erected in every capital of every Arab country."



In describing the career of a pre-Nasserist royalist minister, Fouad Serageddin (above), Ajami waxes romantic: Today, however, Egypt "has gone beyond that pleasant bourgeois age and its houses with gardens"

Ajami, the pragmatist, is horrified because there remains a body of Arab intellectuals who still resist US political, economic and intellectual diktat. Even these pockets of Arab intellectuals with little if any political power constitute an eye-sore for Ajami and his American benefactors. Presumably, Ajami and kindred spirits prefer that such intellectuals be "appeased" like Layth Shubaylat, or even silenced altogether.

Ajami speaks of himself in the book as an Arab. For example, he identifies a number of Arab intellectuals as "my generation of Arabs". When addressing an earlier generation of intellectuals including Naguib Mahfouz and Buland Haidari, he states that "I, and Arabs of my age were their heirs". While examining Malcom Kerr's writings about the Arab world, Ajami asserts that "I was *of* that world [emphasis in original]". All these assertions of his Arabness strike this reader as odd and uncharacteristic of the TV Ajami. When "interpreting" the Arab world to his CBS News viewers or at the conventions of pro-Israel lobbying groups in the US, Ajami always speaks of "we, the Americans" versus "they, the Arabs." It is interesting to note that when Ajami speaks of his Arabness in the book, he always speaks of it in the past. As for his present identity, it is unquestionably and unequivocally American with the only traces of Arabness being his heavy Arabic accent when speaking English.

Still, Ajami is not secure in his staunchly American identity. After co-authoring a report that recommended the use of English instead of Arabic in "some courses" at the University of Kuwait, Ajami recounts how he and the report became the object of "controversy". The "real issue was my invitation to the university, the very fact that I had been permitted entry into Kuwait." Ajami is appalled that a "writer by the name of Baghdadi" attacked him. "For him, I was a servant of American imperial interests...I was a friend of Israel and the Israelis, and, most damning of all, I was a Shu'ubi." Ajami deflects attention from the first two criticisms by engaging only the third. Whereas Ajami is correct in attacking Baghdadi for labeling him a "Shu'ubi," he understands perfectly well that when he is attacked by Arab intellectuals, this is based on his pro-US and pro-Israeli views which always accompany his virulent hostility to the Arabs. His orientalist views of Arab and Muslim countries are everywhere in evidence. The Arab and Muslim worlds, we are told, are "stagnant" and do not change. After quoting Adonis, Ajami proceeds to assert that Arab political "language — and the banners — could change... the dilemmas of the society — its backwardness, its inability to see and define its malady — would persist... The culture would have made another detour. It would have headed right back to its stagnant past." His orientalist generalisations are passed off as facts: Iran is "a society known for both its long periods of submission to despotism and its recurrent rebellions... Temperamentally, Iran has been a land susceptible to the power of ideas, to political and philosophical abstraction, to the pamphleteer...The culture of the Arabian peninsula and the Gulf states has in contrast always been thoroughly empirical and raw." These conclusions are not given to the reader after a thorough examination of Iran's and the Arab Gulf states' histories, societies and politics, rather as logical assertions and truth claims.

In much of the book, Ajami sets himself the task of chastising the US for its well-intentioned interest in the Arab world. The US, according to Ajami, is a sort of Jesus Christ, "a foreign saviour" of the wayward Arabs. The US is said by Ajami to endanger itself and its soldiers and citizens to provide valuable services for the Arabs only to receive in return resentment and contempt from these ingrates. The actions of the US and its citizen-lieutenants representing it in the Arab world, he insists, are cases of "innocence" and philanthropic altruism. Of the American withdrawal from Lebanon after their 1982-1984 intervention, Ajami speaks with much sadness. He tells us that the "young men of Ayatollah Khomeini's crusade and a new breed of wholesalers of terror ... proceeded to demolish the American presence in Beirut." America, Ajami proceeds, had come to Beirut after a "hasty" decision in September 1982. "This was an open-ended, ambiguous errand to a place America did not fully know or understand. America had indulged great hopes that an American era had begun in Lebanon, but the Americans would not stay the course in Lebanon: there was no taste in America for tribal wars in places with tangled histories." American commitment to save Lebanon was so great, Ajami tells us, that despite the murder of American citizens and later the bombing of the American marine barracks, "American officials talked bravely of not walking away from Lebanon." When the Americans had to leave, "Beirut was lost to the new reign of cruelty." The well-intentioned US intervention in Beirut had ended in "heartbreak" and "carnage." Ajami tells us of the 240 (the real number is actually 241) American marines who died in the suicide attack on their headquarters in Beirut in October 1983. Nowhere in his story of the pristine and loving Americans does Ajami tell us of the US Sixth-fleet's marines' savage bombing of the Lebanese mountain town Suq al-Gharb near Beirut with more than 600 shells a day. Those who attacked the US marines are not portrayed by Ajami as responding to this US aggression, rather as "bloodletting" psychopaths intent on killing Americans because they are simply Americans.

Despite such ingratitude, America, the saviour of some Arabs from what Ajami calls "local predators" came again to the succour of Kuwait in 1990. This was not the first such visit that the Americans had paid to the Gulf. Americans, Ajami tells us in a romantic rendition, "came to Arabia in the 1930's and 1940's, but they arrived after the age of empire had passed. And they came to Dhahran, on the Persian Gulf, to soften the life of the desert and take it beyond its history of desolation and scarcity... They were careful not to offend the cultural sensibilities of their hosts and to conform to the decorum and style of the place." The monumental American pillage of the Arabian peninsula's wealth since the 1930's constitutes for Ajami a "softening" of the life of the Gulf's Arab inhabitants. For daring to give a different account of the American presence in the Gulf, Abdel-Rahman Munif is accused by Ajami of being nothing short of an orientalist whose fiction is "drawn from the *Arabian Nights*."

Ajami ridicules the Kuwaitis whose foreign minister had the audacity to dismiss the Carter Doctrine, a decade before Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, because of the minister's assertion that Arabs are "perfectly capable of preserving their own security and stability." When America came again to save Kuwait, Ajami tells us, it was "a moral crusade... to repel aggression." Ultimately, for Ajami, the American intervention in the Gulf was "a battle between a local predator and a foreign savior." Again, this Christ-like saviour received no proper gratitude or respect. The ungrateful people of the region paid America back with a "terrible bloodletting" in the summer of 1996, killing 19 Americans, a horror preceded by another "terrorist" attack in November 1995 in Riyadh killing five Americans. During the Gulf War, Ajami's concern was for American lives that were lost, never for the Iraqis. "The victory had been swift, American and allied casualties surprisingly light." In fact, in his interminable praise of the Americans, Ajami tells us that it is "not in the American military tradition to shoot a fleeing Army in the back." The fact that US forces strafed the retreating Iraqi soldiers on the Basra-Kuwait highway after their withdrawal from Kuwait, murdering in the process thousands of Iraqis is not relevant to Ajami's pro-American propagandistic assertions.

Whereas Ajami always tells us the numbers of Americans killed in the Middle East, we never learn the numbers of Arabs America killed, nor do we hear of the victims of Israeli aggression. It is not the tens of thousands of Palestinians killed by the Israelis in the last 50 years that Ajami tells us about, rather he provides an inflated number of "four hundred" Palestinian collaborators killed by fellow Palestinians during the Intifada. The young Palestinians who fought the Israeli occupiers during the Intifada are not described as anti-colonial resistors, rather as "cruel, young, undeluded but merciless."

Reading Fouad Ajami, I cannot help but be reminded of an infamous figure in Mexican history — La Malinche. La Malinche, an Aztec woman who spoke Nahuatl, had been sold to the Mayans as a slave and as a result also spoke Mayan. She was offered as a gift to the conquering Spaniards in one of the first encounters between the Spanish conquerors and Native Americans. La Malinche quickly learned Spanish and became one of the main interpreters for Cortés. Having much resentment against her own people propelled her to side with the conquistadors. The importance of La Malinche, however, was not that she became a collaborator with the enemy or even an interpreter for them, but rather her adoption of the Spaniards' value system, their epistemology, and ultimately their goals of conquering and destroying her people. As Tzvetan Todorov explains in his book *The Conquest of America*, La Malinche "performs a sort of cultural conversion, interpreting for Cortés not only the Indians' words but also their actions." In reminding the reader of La Malinche, I am not arguing that Fouad Ajami is the Arab La Malinche, but rather that he dreams of being the Arab La Malinche. Whereas La Malinche had good reason to seek revenge from her own people for selling her as a slave, it is unclear what Ajami's excuse is.

Although Ajami thinks of himself as a dream-interpreter (a sort of modern oneirocritic) delving into the "dreams" and "dream palaces" of the Arabs (an expression he appropriately borrows from T.E. Lawrence), the book is rather an expression of Ajami's own dreams and dream palaces which he projects onto Arab intellectuals. It indeed provides the reader not with a "Generation's Odyssey" of Arab intellectuals, but rather with an account of Ajami's own Odyssey from Arabness into Americanness.

Reviewed by **Joseph Massad**

Plain Talk

My lecture last Wednesday at the Indian Cultural Centre on Mulk Raj Anand brought back pleasent memories of my long years of contacts with this leading Indian writer. Mulk is a leading representative of what M.K. Naik calls Indian English Literature. He must be now over 90 years old but his pen has not rusted and from time to time I read some of his contributions to magazines both in India and in Britain.

I first met Mulk in Moscow in May 1958 when we held the first preparatory meeting of the nascent Afro-Asian Writers Movement. There were some leading Asian and African writers, including Faiz Ahmed Faiz, the leading Pakistani poet, Alex Laguma, a South Africa writer, Safronov and Mirza Tursun Zade from the Soviet Union, Youssef El-Sebai and myself.

That meeting laid the foundation of a movement which grew and developed and which introduced African writers to the world. Its magazine *Lotus*, published in Arabic, English and French, stands witness to this. Most Asian writers were already known, but under the colonialist system very little African writing ever saw the light of day.

The first conference of Afro-Asian Writers was held in Tashkent in December 1948 where I again met with Mulk. We continued to meet regularly, first in Colombo and then in Cairo. I still keep a photograph of Mulk giving a speech in which I am standing next to him translating what he was saying, while President Nasser was standing opposite listening with interest.

I still cherish my talks and discussions with Mulk, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, Sijad Zaheer and our Soviet friends who, under the tolerant leadership of Youssef El-Sebai, created the movement of Afro-Asian writers and tended it for many years. It was an off-shoot of the Afro-Asian Solidarity Movement but, somehow, it endured longer. I suppose the reason is that political movements are affected by the political situation which is always ephemeral. Literature, on the other hand, is like a river which must always follow its course.

My lecture about Mulk Raj Anand was not an academic, critical account of his many works: *Coolie*, *Untouchable*, *Two Leaves and a Bud* and others. It was rather a kind of personal memoir based on discussions with that great writer.

Mulk was a believer in the universality of culture and he often said there was a new tendency which was born after the process of decolonisation. That tendency was part of a new, comprehensive historical humanism which accepted insights from the whole human heritage and compelled men to participate in the emergent, one-world culture.

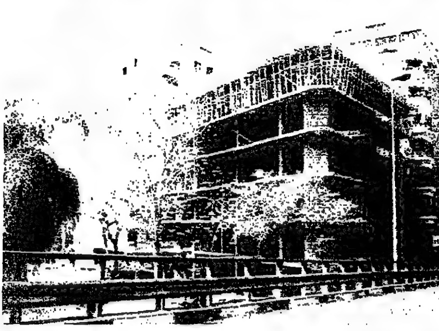
In his opinion, consciously or unconsciously, the most sincere men are dedicated to the acceptance of everything in their own culture, and from other cultures which may help man to fight against nature and realise selfhood.

Mulk was the founder of a beautifully produced cultural magazine called *Mary*, which means the road. He used to send me copies of the magazine which devoted many of its pages to art. Leafing through some of the copies I have I can see his belief in the universality of art surfacing. I still remember a wonderful sentence he often repeated.

"The exuberance of energy and the vision of the artist and the poet is, perhaps, the highest symbol of the rhythm of the universe." In so far as the creative arts today seek to probe the nature of reality, to grasp it, we may be said to have entered an era of the quest for the total human personality.

Mursi Saad El-Din







photos: Sherif Sonbol

(clockwise): High rises are rapidly defacing Cairo's residential suburbs; Maadi Tree Lovers' Association annual spring march; growing old together

Reversing the tide

Spring is traditionally the season of new beginnings. This year, it could herald a new lease of life for the capital, as Cairo's governor issues several decrees protecting its natural and historical heritage. Fayza Hassan reviews the situation

In the past two decades, Cairo's massive urbanisation process has gone berserk. Under the pretext of overpopulation and scarcity of accommodation, every vacant — or potentially vacant — plot of land around the capital has been seized, and important elements of our architectural heritage damaged or destroyed, to make room for the colossal foundations of the high-rises that sprout every day in monstrous sci-fi fashion, courtesy of developers for whom nature and the record of the past represent offensive encroachments on golden opportunities for quick profit.

For a long time, concerned citizens have been sounding the alarm, to no avail. Promises were made and broken while the concrete jungle continued to extend its unsightly protuberances into every nook and cranny, and architectural masterpieces fell by the dozen under the demolishers' ball, accompanied by the sound of electrical saws hacking away at rare tree specimens.

Recently however, the irreversible course of destruction on which Cairo seemed bound has been reversed. Two decrees issued by Cairo Governor Ibrahim Shehata have given new hope to those who thought they were fighting a losing battle.

The first decree, concerning the suburb of Maadi, appeared in the *Official Gazette* No 52 (5 March 1998). It limits the built area to 50 per cent of the surface of any plot of land and the elevation of the building erected to three floors above ground floor level or one time the width of the street, whichever is smaller. Furthermore, to protect the residential character of the suburb, permits for constructions intended for commercial and business purposes will no longer be issued.

Last week, the Tree Lovers' Association's Spring Garden Walk, which coincided with the celebrations of Earth Day, was not only about identifying *Ficus sycomorus* (the sycamore tree, whose sap is said to cure boils), *Schinus molle* (the pepper tree, with its lace-like, tiny leaves), and *Cassia fistula*. It was imbued with a new sort of optimism: the feeling that Maadi's pastoral character might not be lost for ever after all. Landscape architect Asma El-Halwagy, a pillar of the Tree Lovers' Association, who has fought long and hard to save the suburb, was keen to give credit where, she insisted, it was due: "I was not alone in my struggle. I was inspired by Safeya Moine, who did so much to preserve Maadi and its trees, advised by Nur El-Dali, chairman of the association, who was aware of the pitfalls of overdevelopment, encouraged and assisted by all the members of the association as well as the ordinary citizens who take an active interest in the ecological equilibrium of the area. Furthermore, we were especially lucky to have access to Cairo's governor. He took our concerns seriously and acted promptly to avoid further destruction."

There were more surprises in store for the capital, however, as Shehata continued his drive to protect Egypt's heritage. Following the National Campaign for the Preservation of the Architectural Heritage of Modern Egypt, launched last year by *Al-Ahram Weekly* and the Fulbright Commission-Egypt, which aims to foster an appreciation of Egypt's 19th- and 20th-century architectural heritage, and to preserve and revitalise the environment by saving Egypt's cultural patrimony, the governor of Cairo issued Decree 135/1998, establishing the Cairo Governor's Advisory Committee to the campaign, and naming the Fulbright Commission-Egypt as its secretariat. The Cairo Governorate's Regional Organisation for the Promotion of Tourism and the Fulbright Commission-Egypt will be responsible for administrative coordination between the subcommittees and the Advisory Committee.

The campaign's working groups will operate within the framework of Cabinet Decree 463/1998 prohibiting the demolition of villas and palaces throughout the Arab Republic of Egypt, and prepare short- and long-term policies for the implementation of projects. Furthermore, they will gather the necessary technical information and establish a database, identify funding sources and write fund-raising proposals for the Advisory Committee.

Many owners/tenants of buildings targeted for preservation by Decree 463 have expressed concern as to the future market value of their property. A priority on the agenda of the groups is the presentation of alternative options which will allow the conservation/restoration of real estate with historical or architectural significance, without imposing material losses on proprietors.



Days of my life

Saturday: Called plumber. He wanted to know what the problem was. Told him bathroom tap is leaking. He will come some time next week. Meanwhile, he advised not to use basin.

Sunday/Monday: used other bathroom.

Tuesday: Called plumber. A rude young boy told me he was busy, call later. Called another plumber. He was out. Left message. Second plumber did not call. Went to work.

Wednesday: Called first plumber at 7.00am. A woman said he was sleeping. Called at 8.00am, same woman said he was gone for the day. Had to go to work.

Thursday: First plumber showed up, bright and early. He fixed the tap. Told me the cistern of the toilet was making a funny noise. Told him it had sounded that way for twenty years. He checked it. Said it was OK.

Friday: woke up to a flooded bathroom: the cistern was leaking. Never had before. Called the plumber. A child said he was at the mosque. Plumber called ten minutes later. Wanted to know what the problem was. Told him about the cistern. He came immediately. Said he could fix it for the time being and it would work for an hour, a day or a month, he had no way of telling. The right thing was to buy a new toilet. Told him I would think about it. He took a part out of the cistern to see if it could be fixed. Meanwhile he advised not to use toilet. He called an hour later. If I bought the new toilet he could install it tomorrow. Told him I would think about it. How about the faulty part? He said he was working on it.

Saturday: Plumber called. Did I decide to buy new toilet? Said I might. He offered to come with me. Said I would think about it. How about the faulty part? He said it was quite faulty and would take some time to fix.

Sunday: Plumber called. Said he had found a very good toilet at bargain price but it came with basin and bathtub. Told him I only needed a toilet. How about the faulty part? He could not hear me well. Did I say we could buy new appliances tomorrow? No, I hollered. Where was the part he took from my cistern? He was on his way to see what happened to it. He suddenly sounded uninterested.

Monday: Went to look at some toilets. Could not make up my mind.

Tuesday: Plumber called. Did I want a double basin and a sunken bathtub? I rushed out and bought a toilet. Plumber called me at the office. Did I want to change the colour scheme of the other bathroom as well? Told him the new toilet would be delivered tomorrow. Could he come on Thursday?

Wednesday: received toilet and lots of strange looking attachments.

Thursday: Plumber came late in the evening. Examined the toilet and said it was the wrong kind and had the wrong attachments.

Friday: Went with plumber to choose another toilet. Bought floor and wall tiles as well. New toilet would be delivered on Saturday. Plumber took salesman aside. Came back looking perky. Only the more expensive model can work in my bathroom. A dishonest plumber would accept to install the cheaper one. Not he. He has his good reputation to worry about. Didn't I want to look at the bathtubs and basins since we are changing the toilet? He would give me a good price for installing the three pieces. Paid for my purchases in a hurry and left.

Saturday: The shop does not have the expensive model in stock. I have to wait. Used the other bathroom.

Sunday: Called plumber to advise about the delay.

Monday: Toilet was delivered. Called plumber and left message.

Tuesday: Plumber did not show up.

Wednesday: Still no sign of plumber.

Thursday: Plumber arrived. Old toilet was removed, the new one installed in less than half an hour. A mountain of broken tiles sat on my doorstep. The plumber promised to remove it when he finishes the job. He advised not to use the toilet until tomorrow night. I paid him an extortionist price and sighed with relief.

Friday: Used my bathroom. Bliss.

Saturday: The pile of tiles is still on my doorstep. The *bawab* refuses to remove it. The garbage boys refuse to remove it. The *bawab* next door would not mind doing the job but he just had a hernia operation.

Sunday: Woke up to a flooded bathroom. New cistern was leaking. Toilet refused to flush. I called the plumber. A woman told me he was gone for the day. The *bawab* next door was ready to remove the pile of tiles, for a large sum.

Sunday, late pm: Called the plumber at work. He had gone home for the day. The woman who answered the phone advised to turn the water main off. Used the other bathroom.

Sunday: The plumber showed up and fiddled with the cistern: a minor adjustment.

Monday: Woke up to a flooded bathroom. Called the plumber and abused the woman who answered the telephone. Hoped that she was his wife. She was. Plumber arrived ten minutes later. The trouble is the toilet paper. Better not to use any. Also better not to flush very often. I should use the other bathroom, with the old toilet. It is sturdier. They do not make things the way they used to. Plumber removed new toilet and puzzled over a clump of hardened cement blocking the drain. I should change the drains. They are too tight. "Fix the toilet or I'll have you arrested," I hissed insanely. He looked rather surprised, opened his mouth, thought better of it and proceeded to scrape the cement out of the drain.

Tuesday: My new toilet works almost as well as the old one. Plumber called: Is everything all right? Do I want to change the toilet in the second bathroom now?

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Macaroni with leeks and cold cuts

Ingredients:
350 gms elbow macaroni
3 small leeks (chopped in small pieces)
120 gms cold cuts (your choice - chopped)
2 tbsp flour
2.1/2 cups milk
3/4 cup grated tasty cheese
1/4 cup cream
2 tbsp grated parmesan cheese
30 gms butter
60 gms butter (extra)
Salt + pepper + nutmeg (grated)

Method:
Drop macaroni into a large saucepan of boiling water and cook until tender (*al dente*), about 12-15 minutes. Drain and rinse under cold running water. Place in a greased shallow ovenproof serving dish. Sauté leeks and cold cuts in butter for 3-5 minutes. Toss through pasta. Heat extra butter in a saucepan. Add flour and stir until golden. Remove from heat and add milk gradually, stirring continuously over heat until sauce thickens. Season and add cheese and cream. Pour the sauce over macaroni mixture and sprinkle parmesan cheese on top. Bake in preheated moderate oven until top is coloured. Serve hot with a green salad.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

Enter the dragon

Andrew Steele breathes fire

It's one of those places: if one were giving directions, one would undoubtedly add the tag line, 'You can't miss it'. For indeed if you can find Baghdad Street, you really can't miss the Chinese Dragon, a relatively recent addition to the plethora of Chinese outlets in Heliopolis. A large and fancy lantern hangs above a winding flight of marble steps, which leads to a set of mirrored doors, which lead the diner into the mouth of the dragon. Once inside, 'red' is the adjective that springs to mind. Lots of it. More of the rather twee little lanterns adorn the ceilings. Chinese bathing beauties in a variety of very posed poses perk up the walls. The panelling is stained red, the seating is painted red, and, against all odds, it really looks rather good. Crushed silk table clothes and brutally starched napkins add to the squeaky clean effect, oriental style. It was quiet the night we went to sample their wares, a bit too quiet. One hopes that business is brisker on other nights of the week, since the Chinese Dragon knows its onions as far as the gastronomic delights of the Motherland are concerned. Service, needless to say, was attentive but not embarrassingly so. The music was piped and peaceful — the perfect venue, in fact, for a romantic evening.

The menus offer a number of set platters and a fairly extensive, but not mind-boggling à la carte section. As is my wont, I chose the vegetable spring rolls. It's always a lark to see how they match up, and one is rarely disappointed. It takes a buffoon of a chef to botch a spring roll, after all. Here they are small but very tasty. Thin as thin filo pastry rolls, stuffed with the usual shredded vegetables, which, in this instance, had benefitted from a lovely savoury marinade. Mohamed chose the intriguingly titled Shrimp Toast, which was indeed what it claimed to be — pieces of fried bread topped with a scrumptious egg, shrimp and sesame seed mixture. The sort of dish that's such a wow, one almost wants to order it again. We desisted, however, and got on with the serious business of the main course.

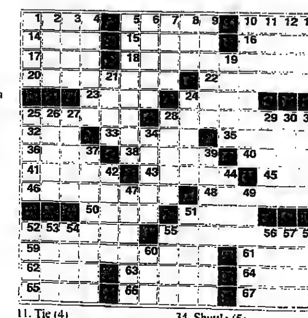
The gun bo shrimps were large and succulent and came in a spicy glaze with thinly sliced vegetables and some wonderfully piquant charred chilli strips. These are recommended. The Szechuan vegetables with bean curd were also a treat, boasting gently simmered oyster mushrooms, strips of bamboo shoot and triangles of pleasantly creamy tofu in a zapping hot sauce. The chicken with green pepper and cashew nuts was less of a winner. Although the sauce was savoury and the cashew nuts bursting with promise, the chicken had been boiled rather than fried and was therefore a little pink for my liking. But it was the texture rather than the taste that was at fault and it would seem churlish to grumble. The accompanying rices were steamed and fried respectively, and met with our approval. To sum up, they definitely know what they're doing at the Chinese Dragon. Good simple Szechuan-inspired chow in pleasant surroundings and laudable service. Not as cheap as one might think, at LE135 for all the above and two Stellas, but not overtly expensive either. Watch those little charred chillies, though: they'll have you spitting fire.

The Chinese Dragon, 40A Baghdad Street, Heliopolis
Tel: 4154704

Al-Ahram Weekly

Crossword

By Samia Abdennour



ACROSS
1. Defacement: cicatrix (4)
5. Beguile (5)
10. What Jack Horner pulled out (4)
14. Limping (4)
15. Fantasies (8)
16. Well-known Swiss watch makers (4)
17. Second or third hand (4)
18. In a self-centred manner (10)
19. Count again (8)
22. Convenient (6)
23. It follows playing or post (4)
24. Chancel or sanctuary (4)
25. Harsh (6)
28. Operatic voice (8)
32. Monetary unit of Macao, China (3)
33. More protected (5)
35. Intimidate (5)
36. Commies (4)
38. Adjusts spacing between characters (5)
40. Covered colonnade (4)
41. Piqued (5)
43. Pose again (5)
45. Printers' measure, pl. (3)
46. Robust; tenacious (8)
48. Route; development (6)
50. Extreme (4)
51. Epidermis (4)
52. Protective armour (6)
55. Helio's illumination (8)
59. Affectionate (10)
61. Cross; a gibbet (4)
62. Excited (4)
63. Customs (5)
64. Benefit (4)
65. Efface (4)
66. Beast, jumbled (5)
67. Nasal mucus (4)

DOWN
1. Make insinuations against; stigma (4)
2. Situation; canister (4)
3. Assent; by all means (4)
4. Cut back; lessen (6)
5. System of deciding winner from competitors who have scored (8)
6. Came to the boundary (5)
7. Heather covered upland (4)
8. French for pleat (3)
9. A person sampling food (6)
10. Breast feeders; archbishops (8)
11. Tie (4)
12. Freehold state prevailing before feudal system (4)
13. Mythical herb endowed with magic properties (4)
19. Blushing; easily frightened (5)
21. God of War (4)
24. Farm building, pl. (5)
25. Asian dress, pl. (5)
26. Turn inside out (5)
27. Strong alcoholic spirit made by distillation of rye (5)
28. Headdress (5)
29. Semi aquatic mammal (5)
30. Inert gas, pl. (5)
31. Obliterate (5)
34. Shuttle (5)
37. Edging that prevents cloth from unraveling (8)
39. Disease (8)
42. Linger; inhabit (5)
44. Sweat of one's brow (4)
47. Passionate (6)
49. Makes man and wife (6)
51. A summary of what is known of a subject (5)
52. Horse mackerel (4)
53. Gigantic (4)
54. Baal (4)
55. Ailing (4)
56. ... Chaco, Central South America (4)
57. Apotheosis (4)
58. Wigwam (4)
60. Bewail (3)

Last week's solution

هكذا من الأصل

Modigliani on the Metro

George Bahgory's new book, *From Bahgora to Paris*, is just out, but George himself is making the voyage in reverse this time. As always, he has rediscovered Paris. Back in Cairo, he recollects

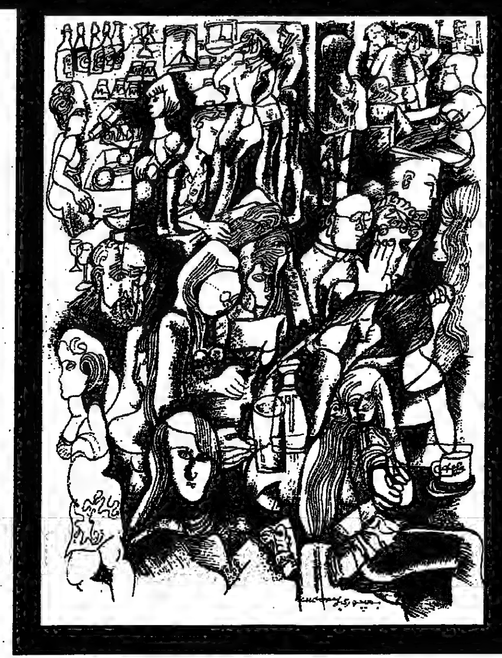
Modigliani approaches, bearing his palette, surrounded by long, eloquent nudes. The red-haired woman's hat trembles as she dances at Renoir's Moulin de la Galette, and the girls at the Moulin Rouge shriek in glee. The line of the tree falls across Pont Marie, parallel to the lines of the grey houses. From white windows, the blue stems of violets sway gently. The grey clouds, tattered, disperse above my head, as the yellow water entrapped within the confines of the Seine's banks begins to run, slowly, beneath Alexander's bridge. A grey pigeon flutters above my head, before sinking down, in eddies; as it comes to land, its naked pink claws curl around the air for an instant, then gently, coolly graze the back of my neck.

Can I see Paris anew, now that I have spent quarter of a century in its streets, among its buildings and statues, on the banks of its river? Days and nights under those grey eaves, in rooms to which servants climbed back-breaking flights of stairs, before the war. For 25 years, I have heard the rain drumming on my roof, over my head. I had only to push open the window, and the rain would wash my face. Above these skeins of water, more grey clouds, parting now and then over the bluest moon I have seen.

Shall I return, tomorrow morning, after tonight's rain, to mingle with the throngs of tourists in open-mouthed contemplation of Notre Dame's façade? When morning comes, this mountain is transformed, once again, into the face of the Virgin Mary. Shall I place my hat on my head once more, my raincoat on my shoulders, leap over what Paris's canine inhabitants have left on my doorstep, and return, to sit once more in the cave beneath the Pont Marie? From this vantage point, I shall admire the yellow waters of the Seine, as they run sluggishly by. Shall I look up, then, to the clouds battling above me, above the peaks of the Sacré Coeur, above the mountains of Montmartre?

I could become a child once more, or a silly tourist, gazing at this magic mountain spun from holy lace. I still have my contemplation, my old obsessions, my drawings in one thousand and one sketchbooks. It is too difficult not to gaze upon everything as if this was the first time. I return, today, with my eyes, the eyes of a child, a painter, or a silly tourist: the eyes I keep for Paris.

Edited by **Pascale Ghazaleh**







Do the stones of the Paris Opera dance *Swan Lake*? This unrivalled jewel of French architecture seems to drift somewhere above ground level. Visitors cannot believe their eyes. They sit on the stairs and stare, and gape, as Charlie Chaplin shuffles by, and an ersatz Piaf belts out *La Vie en Rose*



TIME OFF AT NABTA PLAYA the announcement that American scholars in Egypt's western desert had unearthed what may be the world's oldest human settlement made headlines at the beginning of March.

The area lies 180 kilometres west of the temple of Abu Simbel, in a great depression which might have been a seasonal lake in times long passed, when the Sahara desert was savannah.

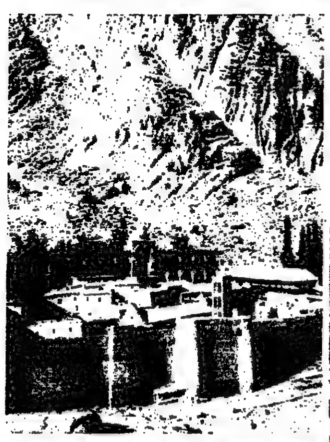
The site comprises some 18 villages scattered across 38 square kilometres in groups of 18 to 50 oval-shaped stone dwellings.

Scholars, journalists and photographers who accompanied Fred Wendorf, head of excavations in the area, and members of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, found a huge sand-dune on which to take their picnic lunch, away from cow skeletons in burial grounds, ostrich eggs, flint tools and pottery.

photo: Khaled El-Fiqi

Martyred in Alexandria, adored in Sinai

The little-visited Church of Saint Catherine in Alexandria is linked with the famous monastery in Sinai by their common dedication to the fourth-century martyr. **Samir Naoum** goes looking for connections







photos: Samir Naoum

The basilica in southern Sinai lies in the remote mountains within a walled monastery, while the neo-classical structure in Alexandria is in a heavily populated area of the capital

The Church of Saint Catherine in Alexandria is an elegant if somewhat eclectic modern basilica with a facade characterised above all by its height. This two-level neo-classical construction was designed by Italian architects and built in 1847.

In contrast, the monastery dedicated to the same saint in the Sinai is a large fortified structure built in 530 by the Emperor Justinian. Although the basilica is totally unimpressive from the outside, with its simple walls made of dressed granite and covered with a simple corrugated iron roof, its interior is an impressive example of Greek ecclesiastical architecture and ornament.

These two sites, one on the Mediterranean coast and the other in the rugged mountains of southern Sinai, are both dedicated to one of the most popular of Christian saints. Saint Catherine of Alexandria is understood to have died a virgin martyr at the beginning of the fourth century. The daughter of a wealthy family, she was not only tall, beautiful and gracious, but was well versed in poetry, philosophy and mathematics. According to one popular tradition, she witnessed with grief how the emperor promoted the worship of idols, and tried unsuccessfully to convert him to Christianity. For her efforts she was cruelly tortured and put to death.

Both basilicas attract pilgrims from all over the world. The Alexandrian church is sacred because it is believed to have been built on the site where the saint was beheaded on 25 November 305. At her death milk, not blood, reputedly flowed from her wounds and inside the chapel is a block of marble believed to have come from the column to which she was bound. The Sinai church is especially venerated because it contains two golden reliquaries, the first housing the hand of the saint adorned with sparkling rings and bracelets, the second her skull.

There are several different traditions purporting to explain Saint Catherine's association with the Sinai. According to one popular version, five centuries after her martyrdom a monk in Sinai had a vision in which he saw the dead saint's body become radiant with light as it was lifted by angels to a peak near Mount Sinai (subsequently known as Mount Catherine), where it remained incorruptible. When monks ascended the mountain in the ninth century, they found the intact body, which exuded a sweet-smelling myrrh that was periodically collected in small bottles because it was believed to have holy and healing properties.

Among the eleventh-century pilgrims to journey to the mountain was a monk called Simon. He found that three finger-bones had detached themselves from her hand and he took them to the Abbey of the Trinity in Rouen, France, whence the news of her martyrdom spread rapidly throughout Christendom. The rest of her remains were carried to the monastery in Sinai which now bears her name.

The cult of Saint Catherine spread yet further with the prosecution of the Crusades, and legends multiplied around her relics and the healing properties that were claimed for them.

The Church of Saint Catherine in Alexandria, built on a plot of land offered for the purpose by Mohamed Ali in the last days of Moharram Bey's governorship, is a modern structure. It was designed by the architects P Barbiet and Sons, inaugurated in 1850, and renovated in 1927. It is built on the basilica plan with three porticos. A statue of the saint adorns the central main entrance. The body of the church is rectangular in shape, with the central portico wide, high and adorned with colonnades, each comprising four round arches and vaulting. These arches separate the central portico from the side aisles. The capitals are Ionic, and the central vault is decorated with brightly-coloured representations of saints set into four circular niches. Below these are four windows which rest on ornamental reliefs.

In front of the central portico is a spherical dome decorated with geometrical designs. Below the dome stands the main altar of imported Italian marble, which is elliptical in shape and decorated with plant designs. Behind the main altar is a marble plaque bearing the name of King Vittorio Emanuele (1869-1947). Apparently, the Italian Republic had asked King Farouk, with whom Vittore Emanuele had strong ties, to allow him to spend the rest of his life in Alexandria after he was deposed. Before his death the former king of Italy asked to be interred in Saint Catherine's Church.

Neo-classical elements in the church include baroque curves and "rounded triangles". Both sides of the basilica are decorated with brightly-coloured icons of the saints. One shows Saint Catherine preaching the gospel to a group of pagans and was donated to the church by the Emperor of Austria in 1849.

The right portico is divided into four parts: the first has a door leading to the church garden, the second a small altar with statues of saints, the third a rectangular niche over another small altar bearing a statue of Jesus Christ on the Cross, and the fourth a wall relief representing an angel.

There is also a round baptismal font of marble in the shape of a flower whose branches stretch exquisitely over the sides. The church tower with its round clockface and bells stands to the north-east and is accessible by means of a spiral stairway.

In Sinai, the bell tower of the Monastery of Saint Catherine is separate from the church and houses nine bells of different sizes which were presented by the Russian Church in 1871, as well as an ancient wooden bell which had been used earlier. Like the church in Alexandria, the interior of the church is rich and opulent, but in classical Greek style. A gilded iconostasis is crowned by a great crucifix painted in bright colours. The altar is inlaid with mother-of-pearl, and there are eighteenth-century vigil lamps and huge bronze chandeliers, presented as gifts by wealthy benefactors. One of the finest items in the building, though, is the seventeenth-century icon which shows the saint sitting surrounded by books which represent her learning and the wheel of her martyrdom.

Practical information: Saint Catherine's Church in Alexandria is in the district of El-Manshia Es-Soghra. Saint Catherine's Monastery in Sinai lies 440km from Cairo and 309km from the Canal tunnel. For further reading, see: The Monastery of Saint Catherine in Sinai *by Jill Kamil, distributed by AUC Press and all major book shops.*

Insurance coverage for tourists

In an effort to stop the fall in the number of tourists coming to Egypt, the government is lobbying international insurance companies to join in providing coverage for visitors. **Reem Leila** reports

Foreign travel agencies previously paid insurance for clients against any harm that might come to them while abroad. After the 17 November massacre in Luxor, in which 58 foreign tourists were killed by terrorists, most of these agencies stopped paying insurance for travellers to Egypt and, indeed, stopped issuing tickets to Egypt altogether. The Egyptian government has now taken a step to provide a substitute.

An insurance accord, designed to provide protection against terrorism for tourists coming via travel agencies, and coverage against various injuries and death, is being drawn up by the Ministry of Tourism and Egypt Travel Agents Association (ETAA). The accord takes effect at the start of May and the ministry and ETAA are urging European countries to join.

According to Adel Abdel-Razik, a member of the ETAA and owner of a travel company, the ETAA, along with the Ministry of Tourism, will issue a one-dollar insurance bill on each ticket. Tourists will not bear the cost, and compensation will range from $100,000 to $500,000 in case of injury, partial or total disability or death.

The scheme, to be made in coordination with the Tourist Authority and international insurance companies, has already encouraged some travel agencies to remove Egypt from their blacklist and return it on their list of recommended destinations.

Following the government's enforcement of new security arrangements, delegations from Britain, Germany and Italy, among others, visited Egypt in the past month and, said Abdel-Razik, "members of several countries welcomed the new security arrangements and have returned to their countries to write positively about Egypt. Articles written in their media have done much to change Egypt's image in people's minds."

Several Egyptian insurance companies had wanted to issue insurance coverage but the government deemed it better to encourage foreign tourists by coordinating with international travel agencies. "It was considered more logical, not to mention reassuring, for foreigners if an agreement were made between tourist authorities and international companies," said Elhamy El-Zayat, head of the ETAA.

Tourists who talked to *Al-Ahram Weekly* last week about the new scheme were delighted. None were aware beforehand that such a scheme was in the pipeline but when they heard details, many said it would undoubtedly instil greater confidence in travellers wanting to visit Egypt.

Briton Andrew Thomson said, "I hope more information will be circulated to travellers about the efforts being made by the Egyptian government."

"This new bill will undoubtedly help increase the number of tourists to Egypt, and encourage those who cancelled their trips to book again," said tourist Emma Stephenson.

There will be two types of insurance: seven-year coverage and another of shorter duration. "The first will be useful for those who come regularly to Egypt," said El-Zayat. "The other kind will help those who visit Egypt briefly, for cultural tourism." Both bills will cost the same, but they will be issued only to travellers booking through authorised travel agencies.

Only about 1.5 million tourists out of four million will consequently benefit from the new scheme. The remaining 2.5 million are either Sudanese residents or Arab travellers "who refuse the whole concept since they come to Egypt individually." As soon as the new plan is put into effect, a public relations committee affiliated to the Ministry of Tourism will be assigned to explain how it works and to emphasise its benefits," added El-Zayat.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter; from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter.
A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street. Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am).
Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians, to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Turbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

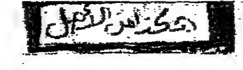
Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE346 for Egyptians, LE1145 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE254 for Egyptians, LE831 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE899 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE947 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by ***Rehab Saad***



Ding dong Zamalek

The first Egyptian Elite Table Tennis Championship brought together the country's best players so as to winnow out a national team for the coming Olympic Tournament in Moscow next May. **Abeer Anwar** sorts her pings from her pongs

Egypt's best players playing in the Elite table tennis Championship — photos: Emad Nassri

In the first Egyptian Elite Table Tennis Championship held at Zamalek Indoor Halls, Ashraf Sobhi and Shaimaa Abdel-Aziz carried off the cups in, respectively, the men's and women's events. The top 16 men and the top eight women in the league tournament were invited to take part in the three-day event. The 16 men were divided into four groups, the eight women into two. After this season's strong rivalry between experienced African and Arab champions, there were a number of surprises in store at the Elite. Top African champions, Ashraf Helmi and Sherif El-Sakat were eliminated by junior players Ahmed Saleh and Amr Reda. Ashraf Sobhi, however, who recently transferred from Ahli where he spent most of his sporting career to Zamalek, was able to reach the semifinals after beating Ayman Zakaria 2-1 (19-21, 21-10, 21-12). In the semifinals, he beat El-Sayed Lasheen easily 2-0 to qualify for the final. There his opponent was Ahmed Salah who qualified after beating the junior star Amr Reda 2-1 (21-14, 21-4, 9-21). However, it was experience that won the day in the most lively and close-fought match of the whole competition, Sobhi taking the cup 2-0 (23-21, 21-17).

In the women's event, Shaimaa Abdel-Aziz, the African and Arab junior champion, who is only 16, triumphed easily in the absence of any strong competition. Even Sherine El-Alfi, once Egypt's foremost table tennis player and Zamalek's star for many years, succumbed to her easily enough in the quarterfinals 2-1. In the semifinals, Abdel-Aziz beat Bassant Othman 2-1 to meet Gihan El-Sayed. This was an easy match for Abde-Aziz as her enthusiasm overwhelmed El-Sayed's experience 2-0 in less than a quarter of an hour (21-10, 21-11).

Commenting on the standard of the matches, Dr Samir Beltagui, head of the Egyptian Table Tennis Federation, commented, "It was a great success. The championship will now be an annual event in the Federation's calendar, as it gives our top players the chance to meet and facilitates our choice of the national team." As for the coming Olympic Tournament in Moscow, Beltagui thinks that Shaimaa Abdel-Aziz will be able to do something for Egypt, but "it will be a difficult competition, as there will be a number of strong junior under-17 players from countries such as Japan and South America." As for Shaimaa Abdel-Aziz, she expressed her happiness by saying, "I couldn't believe that I beat players I have taken as my models. I will do my best in the future to win a place for Egypt in the coming Olympic Tournament in Moscow." Abdel-Aziz will be taking part in a closed camp until the end of May at the Olympic Centre in Maadi.

Maged Ashour, the national team coach, commented, "I have made a training plan for the eight players who will take part in the event in Moscow. The team will go into closed camp at the Olympic Centre and will also participate in the Arab and African championships as part of their preparation."

Ashraf Sobhi, for his part, was delighted with his victory. "I am very happy that I was able to win the cup for Zamalek, the club to which I have just transferred. I hope I'll be able to bring something back from the World Championship in Malaysia next year as well."

Isis on ice

What do you dream of in this hot dusty weather? Some people dream of snow. They want to touch ice, smell ice, breathe ice. They *like* to feel cold. And now they can have their dreams come true, even here in Egypt. **Nashwa Abdel-Tawab** loses her head — and her balance



Kids on the ice and maybe the next Torvill and Dean will be born on the banks of the Nile — photos: Mohamed Mosaad

In last week's heat wave, I put my routine life on hold and took shelter in a four-walled first-floor walk-in freezer, an air-conditioned fortress, repelling all dust, accepting no temperatures of 45°C. You envy me, I know. And, of course, you're right to. But don't think I was enjoying myself. I'm a warm-blooded creature, after all: not an ice maiden. If I was imprisoned in an igloo, however beautiful it might be, I'd melt my way out in no time.

Still I sat there with a friend of mine, tediously listing our dreams. Oh! If I had Aladdin's lamp, I said, I would build an indoor snow field for my fellow deprived, tortured and sports-addicted countrymen. An ice palace, a refuge of cold, somewhere you could go with your friends to dance, spin and jump, where there's no friction to hold your back, no gravity to pull you down. Oh! No sooner had I said it, than all these ideas were dancing in a ring in my mind! If only I could make them a reality...

To my surprise, I was told that my dream had already come true — in, of all places, Maadi. "If it's snow you're after, stop dreaming. There's some businessman already thought of that," said my friend. Sounds quite casual, doesn't she? It's okay for her: she's not a sports addict. But I need my fix. I had to mainline me some ice, before the heat turned all my dreams to water. I needed a shot of the white stuff. Jumping from my bed (because that, dear reader, is where I was) I fled my cool paradise for the hellish roads of Cairo and the way to the south, where the Helwan cement works cast their long chilly shadows, and the penguins waddle, and the polar bears roam.

Like foreigners when they see the Pyramids or the vast desert for the first time, so I felt my heart lift, flutter and almost stop dead, when I first caught sight of the ring. But what was I, an Egyptian, doing there? What was I thinking of, steeping out onto its 310 circular metres of sheer white treachery? I may be famous for having the guts, and all my friends may have believed I wouldn't hesitate to pick up my skates and trip the light fantastic, but all I could think was that after all these years of being thrown out of planes, dragged backwards through hedgerows, and picked up and used as a club with which to thwack balls of various sizes, I, I at last, I was going to *dare* to learn to skate. Skate? *Moi?* With all its thrills and spills and bumps and falls, and of course bruises, that I entirely hate? How can you teach an old desert dog new tricks, especially when they belong of right to a shaggier critter, a husky or a St Bernard? I didn't have a sleigh to pull; I didn't even have a little barrel to hang round my neck. I didn't want to romp across the arctic wastes, or scale glaciers to bring travellers back to life from the final stages of exposure. But then I heard the spirit whisper in my ear: *Now, now, Nashwa: it's never too late to learn.*

So my courage and my sense of adventure won out. I stuffed my fear down into the bottom of my knapsack with my old trainers, and broke into the ring on a pair of blades. "How can I trust these two knives?" I wondered. The rink may be circular, but I knew I had booked a one-way ticket to instability. I bent down and pinched the ice, just to make sure it was real. They keep it at -9°C — ideal for treating typhus fever or mixing a pina colada. When I felt it sear the plams of my hands, that's when I realised that ice-skating is a sport for countries who are used to this kind of thing: countries where people keep chains on the wheels of their Volvos, countries where people can ski into work from the suburbs eight months out of twelve. They're used to it, whereas we, we've only seen the stuff in our refrigerators, or in films. That doesn't mean that we can't do it. But we Egyptians were born with sand under our fingernails. We like our ice in our drinks, not on our sidewalks. That's our geographical inheritance. We come from the earth, not from some chilled paradise, and the sign of our belonging is a handful of dust.

Still, the Swedes have sand pits, so why shouldn't we have ice rinks? So I got out there, and soon I was shaking and swinging, fluctuating to and fro. It was bad karma — I hate falling over — but there was no way out of it. Indeed, you can hardly avoid it. So I fell. Just standing up on your blades may seem easy, but to the beginner it's like learning to walk all over again. My first steps were funny, hard and painful, but also encouraging, thanks especially to the supervision of two Canadian teachers.

Josée Boudreau has 14 years' experience of teaching ice skills and Chantal Bazin has 12. These two highly qualified women give classes at the Holiday Centre in Maadi to all who want to learn — young and old, fat and thin, men and women. The science of ice skating falls (or rather, doesn't) into three main branches: skills, freestyle and dance. A teacher has to pass eight levels in skills, five in freestyle and 21 in dance. Josée and Chantal have swept past them all, and now they are passing on what they've learnt to a new generation of cool-footed dudes — iced Cairenes and frozen Pharaohs.

"I haven't enjoyed teaching skating as much as I do now since I left Canada," said Boudreau enthusiastically. "There, kids are born to skate, but here it's their first ice and the kids are ignorant of everything about skating. You teach them their skating ABC. It's quite new for me and very fruitful." Both women agree they enjoy teaching kids more than adults. "Grown-ups are frightened to fall, whereas kids are fast learners, especially if they know how to rollerskate," added Bazin. So far they've turned out 75 Egyptian skaters between them.

As I finished my one-hour class I was glad to touch solid ground again. But still, even if all my worst fears were confirmed, I'm determined to go on skating, at least until I've got the basic skills off pat. I know I'm never going to be one of those Russian women with legs like an old race horse who can perform triple axles at 75mph while being deafened for life by Ravel's *Bolero*. But when the doldrums come and the dog days with them and everyone else is buried under fifty meters of heavy metals and sheer heat, at least I'll be able to go back to Maadi and practice my grindingly slow figures of eight. As I left the ice hall and climbed up the stairs back into the real world, I heard a beautiful six-year-old girl asking her father, "Can I do ice-skating today, daddy?" Oh not again! It seems that it's already a phenomenon in Maadi. Fortunately for some, the outsiders haven't caught on yet.

So remember the golden rule of winter sports, and indeed of life itself: those who get carried away will end up flat on their bum one day. Egypt won't be producing ice skating champions for some time yet. Even 10 years may be too soon. But my dream came true, so maybe be other people's will too. Nowadays in Egypt, everything is possible. So maybe our children will learn to dance with the penguins. Maybe the next Torvill and Dean will be born on the banks of the Nile — or at least, within walking distance of the Grand Mall. And maybe this winter it really will snow in Minya.

Egypt in Asia

African countries want Egypt to quit as a member of the African Taekwondo Federation. **Eman Abdel-Moeti** examines a possible conspiracy

Kenya firmly believes that the Egyptian national taekwondo team should play its Olympic qualifying matches in Asia, not Africa. A Kenyan official has sent a petition to the World Taekwondo Federation asking it to consider Egypt a member of the Asian federation instead. An unusual request, and the unnamed Kenyan official had an unusual explanation. He said it was unfair that African countries, new to the sport, should compete against Egypt, which has played the game for two decades, and is of world championship calibre, challenging the likes of Korea and China-Taipei for global dominance. For example, in the last World Taekwondo Championships held in Hong Kong, Egypt came in fourth out of 64 teams. No African country even came close. And the Egyptian national team is currently preparing to participate in the 16-country World Cup.

The Kenyan request is only half the story. South Africa and Kenya, among other African countries, are to hold an unofficial African championship in August, but the tournament's main aim seems to be a sideline discussion on how to replace African Taekwondo Federation President Sayed Khashaba, an Egyptian, with a Kenyan. Egypt was not invited to the championship (which is not officially recognised by the World Federation). Neither was Khashaba and another Egyptian, Secretary-General of the African Federation Amr Khairy.

Khairy, who is also manager of the Egyptian federation, said that African countries do not want Egypt to compete against them "because they know we will win in the end and qualify for the Olympics. If they have to compete against us, they want it to be held in the poor weather conditions prevailing in Kenya or South Africa, which would be detrimental to our players' performance."

Obviously, some African countries want to take a shortcut to the Olympics, and are unable to accept the fact that Egypt, ranked in the top five teams in the world since 1992, has the more experienced players.

In the Sixth All-Africa Games, held in Zimbabwe in 1995, Egypt won six taekwondo gold medals on the first two days of competition. On the second-to-last day, a Kenyan member of the squad asked Khairy to let his players win the last two gold medals. As Khairy tells it, "He told me, 'You have already won six gold medals, why don't you let us win the last two?' I did not listen to him, of course, and our players won. That is what angered them." Egypt collected all eight gold medals in Zimbabwe, coming in first place, followed by South Africa.

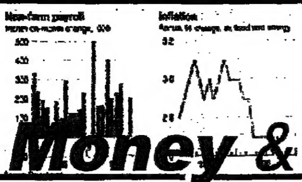
Egyptian national team players are what they are today because they have had the opportunity to compete against world-class players in international competition. It seems only logical that African taekwondo players would want to take advantage of the African championships to compete against the world-class Egyptian players. Unless that happens, not even replacing Khashaba is going to guarantee Kenya's taekwondo players a passage to the 2000 Summer Olympics in Sydney.

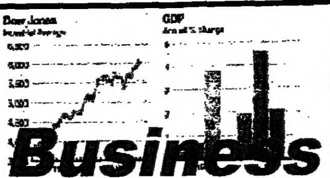
Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

New company established

HC HOLDING *Company for Financial Securities and Investment* has been established to manage investment funds. Hussein Shukri, head of the company, said that company has been licensed by the Capital Market Authority to provide portfolio management and subscription promotion and coverage.

It is well known that Morgan Stanley/Dean Witter holds a *30 per cent share of HC Co.* The American company holds an investment portfolio of $338 billion, 12 million of which is in emerging markets.





Money & Business

Clear Cut eyeglasses from SFC

EYEGLASSES *for people over 40 are necessary to maintain* strong eyesight. Without it, reading or even performing everyday activities becomes difficult as the corneas lose their elasticity, and as a result, become less able to receive images as clearly as before.

Clear Cut has different sizes of frames available. Choose the most suitable ones for you; you can even wear them while wearing contact lenses. *Clear Cut eyeglasses are distributed by* MultiPharma, and are available at all major pharmacies and supermarkets.

NBE: A new concept for its social role

THOUGH the National Bank of Egypt's (NBE) role has mainly been economic, no one can deny the outstanding social role it plays through participating in maintaining social security and stability with a view to safeguarding the process of comprehensive development.

In light of the Egyptian economy's adoption of market mechanisms and the increasing role played by the private sector in economic development, NBE is adopting a strategy geared towards organising specialised training programmes to create a new breed businessmen. This training focuses on finance, management and marketing, with a view to improving and enhancing businessmen's experience and performance. NBE will also select, for training courses, new businessmen recommended by the Bank's key *clients, heads of the new urban communities*, businessmen's and investors' unions. This is regarded as a preliminary step towards opening new vistas for promising businessmen as well as broadening participation in giant projects.

As the Bank believes in the significance of creating new job opportunities, to absorb unemployment, increase production and accelerate economic development, it is keen on extending finance and establishing as well as participating in economic development projects, especially giant ones, such as Toshki, Sinai development and Sharq Al-Tafriaa projects.

This trend comes in line with the Bank's other finance programmes tilted towards supporting small scale industries so as to create more job opportunities. Since May 1993, NBE signed 24 contracts with the Social Fund for Development (SFD) with a total value of *LE475 million*, 7 of which were signed with the SFD solely at LE370 million, while the other 17 were concluded with the different NGOs in *addition to the SFD at LE105 million. Those contracts* aimed at re-lending such amounts to targeted categories according to the regulations and conditions set by the SFD regarding the appropriate place and experience.

It is worth mentioning that the credit granted by NBE to small scale production projects amounted to some LE1 billion, namely, 70 per cent of total credit granted by all banks to such projects and 40 per cent of the loans granted by banks via the SFD. According to recent statistics prepared last December by the Credit Guarantee Company for Small Scale Enterprises, the company issued guarantees for NBE's clients of small scale projects and the new graduate physicians' health care programme, representing 45 to 60 per cent of total guarantees issued in favour of all banks dealing with this company. The total number of the relevant *loan beneficiaries amounts to some 29,000 graduates* and craftsmen.

In fact, NBE is playing a significant role in the field *of social services via financing social service utilities* as well as organisations and institutions interested in social affairs, health, education and training. Moreover, NBE is always providing the necessary support in cases of national crises.



Mahmoud Abdel-Aziz Chairman of the Board National Bank of Egypt

Empowerment through knowledge: IDRC's mission

THE INTERNATIONAL Development Research Centre (IDRC) is a public corporation created by an act of the Canadian Parliament in 1970, whose mission is to contribute to development in the developing world by supporting scientific and technical research. Research provides the means for acquiring appropriate knowledge. The capacity to conduct research, is therefore a necessary condition for empowerment. IDRC is dedicated to creating and enhancing research capacity in developing regions in response to needs that are determined by the people of those regions. The majority of IDRC's funding comes from bilateral donors, international organisations, foundations and operational revenues.

The Centre concentrates on applied field research that promises to yield results *that will benefit* ordinary people, particularly research bearing upon the problems of poverty.

IDRC mainly supports developing country researchers. In its 28 years of existence, IDRC has funded more that 6,000 projects in more than 100 countries. Project proposals are approved by IDRC according to: the basis of development needs, research capacity, scientific rigour, potential to use research results, the priorities of the government in the country where the recipient is located, applicability beyond the country in which *the project is carried out, use of local* resources, development of human resources, and impact on the beneficiary. To better address the problems of the developing world, IDRC concentrates its actions in the following research areas: food security, equity in natural resource use, biodiversity, conservation, sustainable employment, strategies and policies for healthy societies and information and communication. The Centre has seven regional offices in Asia, Africa and Latin America. With offices around the world, IDRC brings a multilingual team of more than 120 respected scientists and managers with broad experience in applied research and in research management to all projects it undertakes. In addition, projects are supported by a permanent *infrastructure of more than 100 financial*, technical and administrative staff at IDRC headquarters and in regional offices. IDRC's support was instrumental in the *establishment of regional research* networks linking scientists and research institutions across nations and continents. Strengthening and building local institutional capacity for excellent research has become the trademark by which IDRC is known internationally.

The Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa (MERO) was initially established in the region as early as 1974 in Beirut, Lebanon. In 1976 this office moved to Cairo, where it is still located today. Since its creation, MERO has been a proactive force for development in the Middle East and North Africa. The office in Cairo is the focus for activities in Algeria, Cyprus, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the West Bank and Gaza, and Yemen.

While IDRC has the capacity to bring any of its core expertise and worldwide experience to the region, IDRC has developed particular expertise and is currently focusing on several key development issues in the Middle East and North Africa:

— Land and water resource management.

— Small, medium and micro enterprise development and technology for employment creation.

— Peace building and reconstruction.

— Biodiversity conservation.

— Ecosystem impacts on human health.

— *Urban agriculture.*

Examples of recent projects supported by IDRC in the Middle East and North Africa:

1- Water Demand Management Network Project: The limitation of water resources in the Middle East and North Africa, and the economic and environmental costs involved in tapping the few remaining sources, dictate a shift in water management perspectives from the conventional supply-oriented approach to a demand management approach which is based on a broad range of practices and measures: economic incentives and disincentives; regulatory and institutional reforms; improvement of traditional water management practices; adoption of water-efficient technologies; *recycling and recirculation*; improved resource management skills; and education and persuasion. The selection of all suitable practices and measures will take into *consideration economic efficiency, social* equity and fairness, environmental sustainability, and political acceptability, based on sound and solid research results. The water demand management approach seeks to meet the requirements of current and future generations without sacrificing water dependent ecosystems. This project promotes a water demand management research network in the Middle East and North Africa.

2- Participatory Land and Water in Dryland AgroPastoral Areas; Northwest Coast Zone of Egypt (Phase II): The northwest coastal zone of Egypt extends 350km from west of Alexandria to the Libyan border and houses about 120,000 agro-pastoralists. Like most semi-arid regions, this area possesses a fragile natural resource base and offers limited alternatives for sustainable increases in agricultural productivity. Increased cultivation and livestock production have resulted in soil degradation and competition over scarce water resources. This project follows an initial research project whose aim was to evaluate the potential production capacity of the current land use system in a representative watershed of the northwest coast of Egypt, given environmental constraints and population pressure. It aims at integrating in a practical and cost-effective manner, a *wide range of formal and informally*-gathered, quantitative and qualitative biophysical and socioeconomic information to ensure that needs and constraints are identifiable and practical solutions adoptable by inhabitants are generated.

3- Egyptian Small and Micro Enterprise Association (ESMA): Over the last five years, small and micro enterprise (SME) development has been gaining attention and resources in Egypt. This is a result of the central role the informal economy plays in supporting the working poor and its importance in job creation. The wide range of funding for small and micro enterprise initiative has led to an SME development community with a diverse *set of objectives. As a way to share the* experiences and views of these different programmes, an informal networking camp was established in Jan*uary 1995, called the Egyptian Small* and Micro Enterprise Association (ESMA). Since this time, ESMA has served an *important role in bringing together* practitioners from government and non-government organisations, academies, donors and business groups to share ideas regarding small and micro enterprise (SME) development in Egypt. The main objective of ESMA is to provide an institutional mechanism and forum for the regular sharing of information experiences and research findings among the SME de*velopment community in Egypt, in view* of enhancing the effectiveness of current and future SME development programmes and activities in Egypt.

IDRC and the future

The picture of traditional development assistance is changing. As the level of foreign assistance spending decreases *throughout the world, the collaborative* generation and management of research and policy programmes is key to effective and efficient programme delivery to meet the urgent problems related to global poverty.

Recipient institutions and governments now demand equal relationships based on new partnerships and close collaboration. They want to establish more connections with experts and to have greater participation from communities and recipients. These are the principles upon which IDRC has been working for more than a quarter century — *and they remain the cornerstone* upon which future partnerships will be built.

National Bank of Egypt

A weekly update on the NBE Securities Market Index from 16-23 April 1998

CLOSING ON 23/4/98 344.02 POINTS

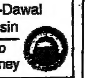
The NBE index has decreased by 3.89 points to register 344.02 points for the week ending 23 April 1998 against 347.91 for the week ending 16 April 1998.

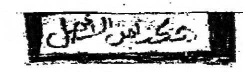
4 largest increases and decreases:

Company	Change %
United Housing & Development	+9.2
Alexandria Spinning and Weaving	+9.1
The Arab Drug Co	+7.2
Mohandes Bank	+1.6

Company	Change %
General Company for Silos and Storage	-7.1
CIB	-6.8
South Cairo and Giza for Grinding and Baking	-5
Alexandria Pharmaceuticals	-4.8











El-Sayed Rashed:

Equity shop

The captain of the good ship Enterprise never forgets the crew

To study law and achieve justice: this was always El-Sayed Rashed's dream. It was not his dream alone: his family had nurtured it every day. But the dream was foiled when his *Thanawiya Amma* grades were below the requirements for admission into the Faculty of Law. Forced to make a foray into the labour market, he was appointed to an administrative job in a spinning and weaving company in Alexandria. But his fascination with the bar had not abated. He decided to sit once more for the *Thanawiya Amma*, and this time he succeeded in entering the faculty, albeit as an auditor. After two years of law (1955-57), however, he decided that trade union activism was a better career — one, furthermore, which allowed him to enter the fray, sleeves rolled up, fighting for workers' rights and redressing the wrongs inflicted by employers. This was just as good as defending the rights of litigants in court, if not better. Enough said: he left the musty courtrooms for the rough and tumble of trade union activism.

El-Sayed Rashed, chairman of the General Egyptian Federation of Trade Unions (GEFTU) was born in a village near Etay Al-Baroud, in Beheira. The year was 1933. He attended the village primary school, then went to Alexandria, where he attended *Al-Urwa Al-Wuthqa* Secondary School. The school's name translates as the Firm Bond — so named after the newspaper published by Jamaleddin Al-Afghani. Who's to say what's in a name?

Having taken said failure to obtain the grades for entering the Faculty of Law on the chin, he instead became an employee of SEIT (today STEA), a company producing luxury textiles. Rashed was delegated to the security department of his company from 1967 to 1975. The security of production units was of paramount importance after the war, and his appointment to this sensitive position was closely associated with his popularity among the workers. But in 1975, he returned to his former position in production until his appointment as chairman of the General Federation of Spinning and Weaving Trade Unions in November 1987. He is currently in his fourth term of office. He pays particular tribute to the pioneers of the trade union movement in Egypt: Anwar Salama, Ahmed Fahim, Abdel-Latif Boltiya, Saad Mohamed Ahmed, Ahmed El-Amawi... It is an illustrious genealogy.

Today, Rashed lives in Sidi Gaber, Alexandria, with his wife and three children (two girls and a boy). He has represented the National Democratic Party in the People's Assembly since 1987. Since 1992, he has been deputy speaker of the People's Assembly, and is a member of its Bureau.

Rashed's responsibilities in Cairo separate him from his family during the week. On weekends, they are happily reunited in Alexandria, where he also meets the members of his constituency, hears their demands and helps them achieve their goals. The rest of the week finds him in Cairo, attending to his many responsibilities. As GEFTU chairman, he has a heavy load to bear. His working days start at 7.00am and rarely end before midnight: this frenzy of activity includes visits to the Federation, the People's Assembly, companies and ministries. Living without his family in Cairo can be an ordeal. Rents are high and his resources limited. But such petty banalities are beneath him. He has rented a modest room with basic facilities in the rest house of the Weavers' Union, built by the late Ahmed Fahim. His lodging costs him LE7.50 a night.

Rashed's first job was in quality and production control. Then he discovered that the technical aspects of weaving were far more challenging than the administrative tasks for which he was responsible. He worked different shifts, his intimacy with the different stages of the weaving process growing until he was promoted to department head in 1969. He has none of the contempt for manual workers so often demonstrated by the liberal professions; on the contrary, doctors, lawyers, journalists or construction workers are much the same: ordinary men and women, struggling to earn a living. The difference, he says, is the side of the fence one is on: "When a worker becomes an employer, he loses his identity."

In 1957, when he was only 22, Rashed joined the SEIT union for administrative employees. That year marked the beginning of a long and active career on the trade union front. But it was not the beginning of his career in the strict sense of the word. At the time, there were two unions in each company, one for workers and another for administrative staff. He and his colleagues worked hard to integrate trade union action, so that each factory could have a single labour organisation instead of two, which could engage in internecine conflict instead of joining forces against the bosses.

The private sector, of course, was none too thrilled about union action, so the union members established their headquarters in shack on a plot of agricultural land in Smouha. Very often, half of the members would be arrested on their way home from a union meeting, after having been trailed by a secret police agent. It was not all cloaks and daggers, though: Rashed eventually became vice-chairman of the union committee, and served as chairman of the Alexandria Federation of Workers' Trade Unions from 1983 to 1987.

In 1987, Rashed became a full-time trade unionist, and was made vice-chairman of GEFTU. In 1992, he was elected chairman of the Federation, a position he occupies to this day. In addition to chairing GEFTU, Rashed is the chairman of the Egyptian Workers' Bank. He also chairs the Workers' Cultural Organisation, an organisation with educational and cultural functions. It exercises its educational mandate through the Workers' University, which grants BA degrees in several specialisations.

As an active trade unionist, he has participated in a plethora of international, African and Arab conferences. The Arab Labour Federation has fostered active interest in the exchange of delegations and the discussion of experiences in various Arab countries. He has visited Syria most frequently, participating in trade union activities there as well. His work has also taken him to Libya, Iraq, Lebanon, Tunisia and Yemen. His travels West took him to England, the US and Switzerland, the latter on account of the Federation's membership in the International Labour Organisation and the endeavours, championed by Switzerland, to unify labour laws. Paradoxically, however, he does not like travelling, and feels that he is duty-bound to remain at home amid the workers: "A trade unionist perishes far from the workers, just as a fish cannot survive out of water."

He will readily admit, however, that travel has broadened his horizons. "Participating in international conferences and learning about the experiences of other workers has made a big difference. When a GEFTU delegation or a group from any workers' union participates in a conference, it presents a report to the Federation. Such reports are thoroughly studied by board members to learn from the experience of others and to avoid replicating errors made by workers elsewhere. We are constantly comparing our performance at home with developments in trade union activity in other countries." Conferences, furthermore, allow access to collective experience: "Although each individual must have his own experience, acquired through first-hand contact and exposure, it is also necessary to learn from the experience of others. No decision can be taken by a single individual: consultation and advice must always be solicited." The leverage that comes with the job seems not to have gone to his head.

It must be difficult, though, to reconcile workers' demands with the constant pressure exerted by capital owners, whose constant attempts to push down wages and pump up production are dictated by their own demon: the profit imperative. The situation must be even more severe in the context of privatisation: experience elsewhere has tended to suggest that workers' rights are among the first to be sacrificed. Not necessarily, asserts Rashed: "In Egypt, we have the right to stage strikes provided we do so in accordance with the law. In other words, strikes must be organised by a trade union organisation, refrain from violence and be approved by management and labour authorities, or in other words, by production and government. The genuine role of a trade union organisation, which is the protection of workers and their rights, is precisely the role we are forging for our organisation: realising our goals through debate and negotiation. Yet the social dimension should not be ignored. We are genuine partners in the economic and production processes."

This is the voice of the new labour unionist: cooperation is better leverage than conflict. And according to Rashed, it works: union members are being given a stake in the success of business, "appointed as board members in joint stock and holding companies, general assemblies, general authorities, governmental departments and institutions. We are partners in the management, planning, execution and monitoring of economic and production entities."

Rashed's assertions of independence are buttressed by GEFTU's refusal to normalise relations with the Israeli labour federation, the Histadrut. "No Egyptian official ever endeavoured to persuade us under the pretext that Egypt was officially at peace with Israel. As an Egyptian workers' federation, we stand in solidarity with the position of the entire Arab nation. We are the largest and most powerful federation in the Arab world, and we will never sit at the same table with the Israeli workers' federation until all Arab land has been restored to its rightful owners."

Rashed has never received a state award for his efforts, but this does not bother him. His greatest reward is "the satisfaction I derive from defending workers' rights, or redressing a wrong. My reward is to help develop the trade union movement. My reward is the satisfaction I derive from fighting for workers' rights with board members, chairmen and ministers in order to institute stable and just principles for the distribution of benefits." He will, however, sit at the president's side on 1 May, as he does every year at the Labour Day celebration: this honour is quite enough.

Rashed himself has actively contributed to the formulation of several laws pertaining to labour, notably privatisation laws. He doesn't oppose the process, although he argues it has been imposed; still, he is convinced that the backbone of a national economy is its public sector. He admits, however, that the public sector has not been entirely successful in fulfilling its objectives, for reasons including its failure to study world markets, perform adequate economic feasibility studies, and replace and renew facilities and equipment.

"The privatisation of economic units combined with the state's commitment to the social well-being of workers is a formula we have endorsed with all our might. The main consideration, our absolute bottom line, is the security of workers and their families. It is a high priority in companies which have been turned over to the private sector."

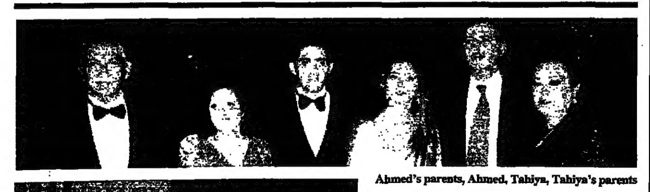
Rashed has also played an important part in developing the law on early retirement. He was instrumental in persuading company chairmen to pay workers a social insurance sum equivalent to 15 months salary in addition to their end of service compensation: a maximum of LE35,000 and a minimum of LE15,000.

His law books, then, have not sat on a dusty shelf. They will stand him in good stead if Arab labour laws are unified; but, he cautions, the establishment of an Arab common market is the necessary prelude to legal unification.

Profile by ***Mahmoud Bakr***

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



Ahmed's parents, Ahmed, Tahiya, Tahiya's parents

❤ April is not the cruelest month — not by far, especially when someone as gracious as my dear friend **Tahiya Khaled Abdel-Nasser**, granddaughter of President **Nasser**, chooses this time of year to celebrate her wedding. What can I tell you, dears? **Tahiya**, who joined *Al-Ahram Weekly* two years ago, left us for more serious endeavours, like finishing her master's at the American University in Cairo, where she was a recipient of the prestigious Sasakawa scholarship, which did not prevent her from saying "I do" at the right time to **Ahmed Sameh Fahmi**, sales manager of Henkel Egypt. The wedding reception, held at the Aida ballroom of the *Marriott Hotel*, was typical **Tahiya**: elegant and understated, and animated by the idol of the young generation, **Amr Diab.** The *Weekly*, needless to say, was well represented. I personally spotted Managing Editor **Hani Shukrallah**, Assistant Chief Editor **Mona Anis** and Sports Editor **Inas Mazhar**. There may have been more of them on the dance floor, but I did not venture there, seeing that the DJ did not seem equipped to play my favourite version of the Lambeth Walk.